

**Mountain Safety Guide:** Essential Tips  
For this winter & for life

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# The Great Outdoors

**EASY WALKS  
INCREDIBLE VIEWS**

**17 LITTLE HILLS WITH BIG REWARDS**

**PYRENEES**  
BIG MOUNTAIN  
ADVENTURES  
BY TRAIN

*Pages 26–33*

**GEAR**

**ON TEST :**  
COLD WEATHER  
BASE LAYERS  
GPS DEVICES



**WILD ABOUT  
BACKPACKING?  
TRY THESE...**

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**CLIMBING  
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**Ed Byrne faces his fears on the Inaccessible Pinnacle**







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# WELCOME



The Arrochar Alps  
and Loch Katrine  
from Ben A'an  
Photo: Keith Fergus

## *Big days, small days*



A FEW YEARS AGO, Munros were my thing. I've no idea how many I tallied – I've never classed myself as a bagger – but a good day out involved at least one summit above 3000ft, ideally two or more. My life has changed since then. And while I know that the time will come when I return to big mountain adventures, right now I have very young children. With sticky little fingers they have

pulled at the parameters of my idea of adventure.

And so it was that I found myself in the Trossachs, on my way up a wee 450m hill, trudging through churned-up mud with a small boy on my back. Tree-felling is currently taking place on the slopes of Ben A'an so the usual path is out of use and I'm afraid the diversion route is... well, let's just say I'd not recommend heading up there until the felling is finished. Or prepare for bog. We forgot

our gaiters and regretted it. In his yellow wellies, our toddler was the best prepared of all of us.

To add insult to injury, the Mountain Weather forecasts were over-optimistic for once and it rained. All of which led us to make the rather embarrassing decision to turn around before we reached the summit (if you've been hillwalking with under-threes, I'm sure you'll understand).

So, to conclude: I spent my Sunday wading through thick mud, missed out on the (hardly ambitious) summit and got rained on. But it was brilliant. Sometimes hillwalking is about incredible views, navigational challenges, pushing yourself towards your limit... and sometimes it's just about getting out there. There's nothing wrong with moderating your ambitions – for a few suggestions of places to do just that, turn to pages 14-24 (but perhaps save Ben A'an for next year). ▲

**Emily Rodway**, *Editor*



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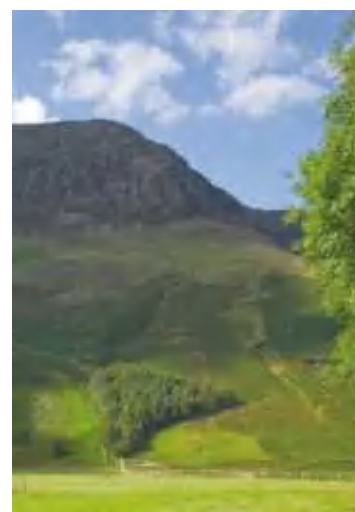


Photo: Paul Richardson



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© BBC / Photo by Matt Smith

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# CONTRIBUTORS & CONTACTS

## Carey Davies

Our regular 'Mountain Magic' columnist has contributed a feature for this month, describing an astonishing few days of cloud inversions, characterful French refuges and mind-bending mountain architecture – all accomplished without getting on a plane (see p26). Closer to home, he's had several rewarding walking and scrambling trips to Snowdonia and the Black Mountains.

### Winter ambition:

"I'd like some snowy days of blue skies and cold rather than rainy murk. And for them to happen when I'm not at work."



Photo: Rusty Bale

## Keith Fergus

Keith has spent much of 2015 in the Cairngorms, working on a guidebook of big day walks in and around the Northern Corries. As well as tackling all the big Munros, Keith has been wandering off-piste, utilising the magnificent network of paths in Britain's biggest National Park to really get into the heart of this awe-inspiring landscape. It has reaffirmed just what a unique place the Cairngorms is.

### Winter ambition:

"In the coming months I'll make several trips onto the plateau for images of the Cairngorms in full winter garb."



## David Lintern

It's been all about Glen Coe and its surrounds for David recently. He took his young family for a wee wild camp in the Black Mount while the weather was good, and also went onto the Aonach Eagach ridge with fellow TGO contributors Andrew Galloway and Stefan Durkacz. He also took a stroll up Buachaille Etive Beag (see p87).

### Winter ambition:

"To get strong on Scottish winter grade 1 and 2 routes before a mountaineering trip to Spain in February, and to practise getting into my harness wearing crampons without falling over."



## Ray Wood

Ray considers his bikepacking trip across Wales (featured in this issue on p46) as his highlight of the year, mainly thanks to the perfect isolation it provided. Visiting popular spots early or late in the day is another way Ray avoids the crowds – he was fortunate enough to spend a few evenings this autumn working as a photographer on wonderful Crib Goch.

### Winter ambition:

"It's hard to make plans when UK snow conditions can be so unpredictable but some spectacular snowy Torridon ridges would be high on my to-do list."



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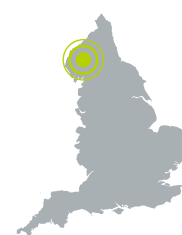
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## Knott Rigg, Lake District

"I shot this during a circuit that took us from Buttermere village, past Crummock Water, in-land to majestic Scale Force, up along Lingcomb Edge and finally to the summit of Red Pike. The weather had been glorious on the start of our climb but by the time we had achieved the top of the Pike, heavy bands of cumulus had begun bunching up. One of my favourite elemental events to witness when walking up in the hills is when breaks in an otherwise moody sky release shafts of sun that dapple the landscape. As the light moves over the surface of the mountains it enriches the hues of grasses, bracken and stone and defines the contours. I sat for a while watching the last of the light play, before a shaky-legged scramble down past lonely Bleaberry Tarn, through shady Burntness Wood and on back to the village."

Photo by Damian Shields  
[damianshields.photoshelter.com](http://damianshields.photoshelter.com)

# ALMANAC

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## December *in the hills*



## Pride of Assynt

Suilven, arguably Scotland's most distinctive mountain, is to get a makeover after topping a worldwide poll

A GIGANTIC PILLAR when seen from the west and a mouth-wateringly tempting concertina-shaped ridge when seen from any other angle, Suilven is the stuff of hillwalkers' dreams. As such, many flock to climb the 731m icon each year, and in recent years this has caused concerns over the amount of degradation the footpaths are suffering. They're now set for some first aid however, thanks to a grant from the

European Outdoor Conservation Association, a not-for-profit organisation based in Switzerland.

Earlier this year the body set up a project to find a worthy winner for care-funds of £18,000. It drew up a shortlist of projects after calling on nominations from its members, then launched a worldwide poll to establish a winner. More than 6000 votes were cast in just two weeks, and 52% of

those went to Assynt's Suilven; the mountain triumphing over other projects in Rwanda, Italy, France and Spain.

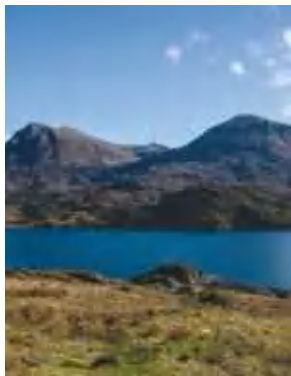
The much-loved mountain was shortlisted for the project after being nominated by Berghaus on behalf of the John Muir Trust and the community-owned Assynt Foundation, who will jointly carry out the restoration work. Another £50,000 of funding is still needed to fully restore the paths, so if you've got any spare change, we're sure it would be appreciated: [jmt.org/support-us/campaigns/662-suilven-path-restoration](http://jmt.org/support-us/campaigns/662-suilven-path-restoration).

**Remarkable Suilven** All photos: Chris Townsend



## QUINAG

More a range than a single mountain, five-mile-long Quinag boasts three Corbett summits. Stand at 808m Sail Gharbh, the highest point of the massif, and on a clear day you'll be able to see across the Minch to Skye and the Western Isles, and down to a multitude of tiny lochans.



## STAC POLLAIDH

Ranked alongside Suilven as one of Scotland's most distinctive, the pinnaced crown of this 612m peak has mountain and ocean views to rival any bigger hill, while there's some proper mountain rock climbing to be had for those who enjoy the vertical. Be aware: exposed scrambling along the pinnacles is required to reach the summit.

## CANISP

It's not the most dramatic hill to look at when compared to its neighbours, but you'll see just about all of Assynt's peaks and much of the rest of north-west Scotland from the top of the 847m 'White Mountain'.



## BEN MORE ASSYNT & CONIVAL

These two summits, both just shy of 1000m, are the highest points of a ridge that makes for a fantastic long day walk – it runs almost the entire length of Assynt's eastern boundary.



# 5

## more assets of Assynt

## CUL MOR

An interestingly shaped hill, with its south summit of pointed Creag nan Calman prominent, 849m Cul Mor wraps itself around its corries in a folded 'Y'. It's a worthwhile climb not just for the views north to its famous neighbours, but also for the excuse to visit Knockan Crag, the first place in the world where the Moine Thrust was identified.



## Barefoot LEJOG



This summer, teacher *Aleks Kashefi* successfully ran from Land's End to John O'Groats – a feat enough in itself, let alone without shoes on...

### *Why a barefoot LEJOG?*

"I first started running (normally) about three years ago and pretty much started training barefoot straight away. Eventually I began to wonder where I could take it and the length of Britain run seemed to kind of makes sense. If anything, doing it barefoot simplified things as it meant I didn't have to worry about choosing the right footwear!"

### *Which parts stood out?*

"The South West Coast Path was just amazing. It felt like I was running through some kind of volcanic post-apocalyptic world full of old abandoned mines and World War Two buildings, and it had sections that would go up and down through woods where you could hear the sea but not see it."

### *How much were you carrying?*

"My pack started at 8kg but once I realised that I didn't need two litres of water each day and didn't need as many sports drinks I dropped the pack weight down to about 6kg. I took a Vaude Lizard Gul which was donated by *backpackinglight.co.uk* that only weighed 700g, borrowed an old Yeti VIB 150 down sleeping bag from a friend, had a Thermatex blanket which I cut down and sewed into a sleeping bag liner, and I ended up with an inflatable mattress but had originally started with a piece of foam that weighed about 80g. It blew away in gales though."

### *Did it go smoothly?*

"It pretty much rained the whole time. It was ridiculously windy

at the start and ridiculously windy at the end. But I really enjoyed it. I aimed for 35 days and it took my 38."

### *Did your feet not get torn to shreds?*

"Not really. I got a few thorns in them but they're easy to get out with a pin. The skin never calloused – it got thicker but always stayed supple. My friend ran with me for three days – in shoes – and ended up with really bad blisters on his toes. All I had was wet feet."

### *But you wore shoes for the evenings?*

"I had a pair of sandals with me for emergencies and in the evenings some pubs insisted I had something on my feet. I didn't carry any spare changes of clothes with me so after a few days I got a bit dirty and was ignored a few times in pubs."

### *What benefits do you see in barefoot running?*

"I'm not an evangelist; I'm not going to run around telling people that they should be running as nature intended. But it works for me. I think it teaches you to be more aware of what's happening with your body; you know what your limitations are."

### *What's next?*

"I quite fancy seeing if you can do the Bob Graham Round barefoot and in 24 hours. I'm off to try the Great End to Wasdale Head section soon. I'm planning to take my shoes off once I hit Scafell and go up Lords Rake then come down the scree shoot that leads down to Wastwater. Most people have said that part will be too difficult, but no one's ever tried it!"

[justgiving.com/barefootlejog](http://justgiving.com/barefootlejog)

# Closing the gap

The Lake District and Yorkshire Dales National Parks are both set to extend next summer



Green Gates, area proposed for inclusion in Yorkshire Dales NP Photo: Colin Speakman

THERE WAS SOME EXCITEMENT when the government first launched an enquiry into the feasibility of narrowing the gap between the Lakes and Yorkshire Dales National Parks by incorporating extra land into both. But that excitement soon petered out as the wait for any conclusion got longer and longer – eventually, it seemed things had been swept under the carpet.

In October the waiting time hit two years, and the unfortunate anniversary encouraged a number of conservation groups to join together in calling on the government to finally respond.

“What on earth is causing the hold up?” said Shaun Spire, Chief Executive of the Campaign to Protect Rural England. “It

beggars belief that the Government has spent two years not coming to a decision on the Lakes-Dales National Park extension.”

The sentiment was echoed by Yorkshire Dales Society Chairman Mark Corner, who said: “The absence of an explanation as to why this decision has not been taken is unacceptable and, frankly, pathetic.”

But these protestations seem to have worked. On 23 October the government offered its long-awaited response, and it turned out to be one we were hoping for. During a visit to Wensleydale, environment secretary Liz Truss announced that from August 2016, 188 square miles between the current

Yorkshire Dales and Lake District boundaries will come under National Park protection; the Dales growing by nearly 25% and Lakes by 3%. The planned extensions will stop just short of linking the two Parks up together with the M6 forming a divide between them.

Martin Holdgate, President at Friends of the Lake District, responded to the news saying: “We are delighted that the Secretary of State has finally confirmed the designation orders for the extensions. These are, and always have been, areas of superb scenery that deserved National Park status years ago. Let’s savour this moment, but then start working to ensure that those in the areas start to see the benefits”.

## AREAS SET TO BECOME ABSORBED BY THE PARKS

### IN THE LAKES...

#### BIRKBECK FELS COMMON TO WHINFELL COMMON

A different Borrowdale valley to the more well-known central Lakes one separates these two commons from each other. They are located in what is currently the narrowest corridor between the two Parks.

#### HELINGTON BARROWS TO SIZERGH FELL

Helsington Barrows sits right on the edge of the current Lake District boundary. Its limestone ridge provides a habitat for the early purple orchid and butterflies including the northern argus and the thyme pug moth.

#### PART OF THE LYTH VALLEY

This valley is loved for its damson orchards (celebrated at an annual event called Damson Day) and woodlands that fill with bluebells in spring. It has a relatively mild micro-climate for northern England. One of its most popular viewpoints is from Gummer’s How from which you can see down to Windermere.

### IN THE DALES...

#### PARTS OF THE ORTON FELS

A plateau made up of limestone pavements and upland heath.

#### THE NORTHERN HOWGILL FELS

The name Howgill derives from the Old Norse word *haugr* meaning hill or barrow, with *gil* meaning a narrow valley.

#### WILD BOAR FELL AND MALLERSTANG

Located on the eastern edge of Cumbria, the 708m Wild Boar Fell takes its name from the animals that once inhabited it over 500 years ago.

#### BARBON, MIDDLETON, CASTERTON & LECK FELS

These fells can be found east of Wharfedale. Leck Fell is particularly notable for its extensive cave network and numerous sink holes.

#### PART OF FIRBANK FELL

This fell between Kendal and Sedburgh contains a boulder known as Fox’s Pulpit, from where George Fox launched the Quaker movement.



## OUR EXOTIC ISLAND

You might assume that rainforest is only to be found in more tropical climes but it turns out we have some right here! In his new book, *The Rainforests of Britain and Ireland* (Sandstone, £25) Clifton Bain celebrates the diverse life found in our deep dark woods. Here are some of his forest facts:



- The Atlantic rainforests grow on the west coast of Britain and Ireland in areas that have more than 1.5 metres of rain per year and up to 4 metres, which is greater than that of many tropical rainforests
- Most of the Atlantic rainforests are ancient oakwoods that have grown in the same place since the last ice age ended over 10,000 years ago
- Sometimes called the 'Celtic rainforest', many of the woodlands retain ancient Celtic names containing Derry, Darach or Derwen, from the time when Druids, 'the wise people of the oakwoods', had their spiritual home in them
- Atlantic rainforests hold over 500 species of lichen with names such as 'octopus suckers', 'smokey joe' or 'blackberries in custard' and the oakwoods are among the best places in Britain for many species of bats
- One of the biggest threats to the Atlantic rainforest is the invasive growth of the rhododendron, a spectacular flower introduced by the Victorians that smothers natural vegetation.

## Outdoor Events

### 28 October-24 November Life After Everest

Stephen Venables embarks on a Community Action Nepal fundraiser, visiting seven different venues around the country to share tales from his climbing life. He'll be discussing his pioneering ascent of the Kangshung Face of Everest and his horrific fall while climbing in the Himalayas with Sir Chris Bonington. Tickets are £15. [canepal.org.uk](http://canepal.org.uk)

### 19-22 November Kendal Mountain Film Festival

This festival has now cemented itself as one of the biggest events on the UK outdoor calendar, drawing thousands of people to the Lake District town each year. 200+ film

entries have been registered for 2015's event, 70 of which will be screened. The festival programme also includes sports events, exhibitions, nighttime entertainment and lectures from names including Kenton Cool, Leo Houlding and regular contributor to *The Great Outdoors* Jon Sparks. Each event is ticketed. [mountainfest.co.uk](http://mountainfest.co.uk)

### 22 November The Best of Kendal Mountain Film Festival 2015

The winning films at Kendal will all travel up the road to Rheged Theatre for a special screening night. Each film will be introduced by the Kendal Mountain Festival team who will explain why the judges chose to award it. Tickets are £9.50 and booking is advised. [rheged.com](http://rheged.com)

### 5-6 December Tour de Trigs

24-hour hiking and navigation team challenge in and around North Oxfordshire, South Warwickshire and South Northamptonshire. [tourdetrigs.org.uk](http://tourdetrigs.org.uk)



## ICE TUNNELS!

Not long before this issue of *TGO* went to press, the first snows of the winter had started to fall in the Cairngorm mountains. But as photographer James Roddie discovered, substantial amounts of the white stuff still remained from last season. These photographs, taken from the Feith Buidhe snowfield near Hell's Lum, were captured by photographer James Roddie in October. The area of snow still remaining from last winter is hundreds of feet long and about 20ft deep at its thickest. See more on James's blog at [jamesroddie.com](http://jamesroddie.com)

# *Taking it easy* **IN THE TROSSACHS**

Why race to 3000ft when the days are short?  
Skip the ambitious stuff and make the most  
of little hills with big views, says **Keith Fergus**




I've done it myself. With a half day to spare I've dashed down to Rowardennan or Arrochar, hammered it up the slopes of Ben Lomond or The Cobbler, eyes on the path, puffing and panting my way to touch the summit, and missing all the superb scenery and wildlife my nearest National Park has to offer.

Even though I make my living by photographing and writing about the outdoors, and am lucky enough to get out and about more than most, the majority of my time is still spent at a computer. I regularly get twitchy if my hill fix isn't met (don't we all?) but there's something almost disrespectful about a quick up and down of Scotland's southernmost Munro just to "get out."

Recently, I have been taking it easy by exploring the

smaller summits of Scotland's inaugural National Park. Size isn't everything (or so I've been told) and this has been confirmed when taking in a number of Lomond and Trossachs hills, most of which barely scrape the 1500ft mark, but which all provide spectacular scenery.

What this approach has given me is the very precious commodity of time – yes, I'm using the same window of opportunity I had when battering my way up Ben Ledi, but now those hours are spent looking, listening and really taking in my surroundings – the flutter of a skylark, the swoosh of a raven or the mew of a buzzard. And sometimes I just sit, kick back, eat a sandwich and relish what time I have. Here are a few of my favourite hills for an invigorating walk when time is limited. 

Craigmore grants  
a wonderful view  
along Loch Ard to  
Ben Lomond



# Cruach Tairbeirt

I remember climbing Cruach Tairbeirt (415m) for the first time and being simply astounded by the view: the Munros of Beinn Narnain, Ben Vane and Ben Vorlich (with Loch Sloy nestled in between the latter pair) and the Corbett of The Brack rising sharply from Arrochar; Loch Lomond with Ben Lomond standing guard; the big jumble of muscular mountains above Crianlarich... However it is the view of The Cobbler, emerging above the long finger of Loch Long, which is a real stand-out, its iconic profile and triumvirate of peaks clearly visible from the little Stack of Tarbet.

From the lochside car park at Tarbet, walk towards Arrochar to Station Road. Once through an underpass beneath the railway line, follow the Cruach Tairbeirt Loop clockwise, through pleasant woodland, home to treecreeper and wood warbler. After just under a mile of forest path, you reach a firebreak on the left, which is waymarked with posts on either side. This was once a sprawling boggy mess but has improved over recent years.

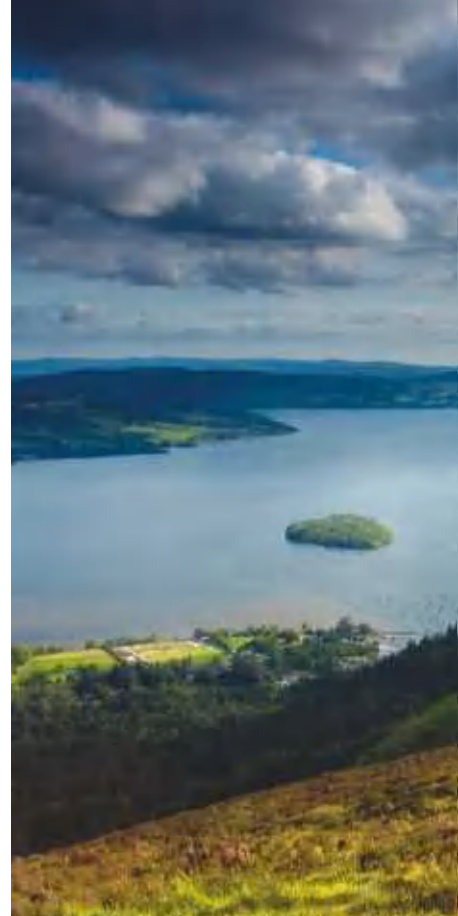
After crossing a burn (a good point to clean the mud off your boots) an excellent path rises above the treeline onto Cruach Tairbeirt's heather-clad upper slopes – the ground here is home to heath orchid, harebell and clover. Not long now to the top and a faint path culminates at the summit trig.

You are unlikely to see too many other walkers here (I think the stories of boot-sucking boggy terrain may have put some off) but it is a lovely place to sit, particularly with your back to the trig and the sun on your face, to relish one of the most extraordinary views in the Southern Highlands or possibly the whole of Scotland.

Loch Long from Cruach Tairbeirt's 415m top



**Start/Finish:**  
Tarbet (GR: NN320046)  
**Time:** 3 hours  
**Distance:** 8km/5 miles  
**Ascent:** 405m/1328ft



Loch Lomond and the Highland Boundary Fault Line

Craigmore grants a wonderful view along Loch Ard to Ben Lomond







**Start/Finish:**

Balmaha (GR:

NS421909)

**Time:** 3 hours

**Distance:**

7.25km/4.5 miles

**Ascent:** 400m/1310ft

# Conic Hill

Conic Hill sits on the Highland Boundary Fault Line, which runs from Arran in the west to Stonehaven near Aberdeen. The fault line separates the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland and when you stand on Conic Hill the divide is instantly evident – to the south flatter plains, broken only by the rolling line of the Campsie Fells, extend towards Glasgow and beyond, while to the north the big, burly mountains of the Southern Highlands vie for your attention.

Conic Hill is a busy spot, its popularity assisted by the West Highland Way, which rises from our start point of Balmaha to run beneath its summit. Nevertheless the hordes can be left behind by descending over the marvellous Druim nam Buraich, one of my favourite spots in the National Park.

Take a moment in Balmaha to pay your respects to wee Tom Weir, a statue of whom was unveiled here in 2014. Then take a straightforward gradual rise along the West Highland Way and through the Queen Elizabeth Forest Park. Beyond the trees a steep climb up and through Bealach Ard (Pass of the Height) grants a fine view of the Campsie Fells. When beneath Conic Hill's knobbly ridge the West Highland Way is left behind for a short, stiff climb onto the ridge.

It is a stunning view along Loch Lomond (with the islands of Inchailloch and Inchmurrin sitting on the Highland Boundary Fault Line) extending to Gare Loch and the extraordinary, jagged profile of Arran. Follow the ridge north-east to cross the 361m summit and then drop back down to the West Highland Way.

Once above Bealach Ard the route diverts onto Druim nam Buraich. The view back to Conic Hill is fabulous, as is the one that continues across Loch Lomond to the Luss Hills. Furthermore, with peace and quiet now the order of the day, take time to appreciate the company of ravens, inevitably swooping above.

# Craigmore

Sitting in the heart of The Trossachs, Aberfoyle is a bustling village whose rural idyll belies its industrial history, as an active centre in the production of slate quarrying and oak charcoal in the 19th Century. The slate was transported via a tramway, part of which is still visible on the lower slopes of Craigmore, a marvellous, rugged hill that climbs to a height of 387m with a view that stretches all the way to Stirling.

The initial stage of this route climbs through woodland that contains remnants of the oak trees that were coppiced every 15-20 years during the four centuries that the land was owned by the Dukes of Montrose. In Britain, oaks are home to more insects than any other tree and woodland birds including wood warblers, chaffinches, treecreepers and jays prosper here.

After reaching the spectacular Little Fawn Falls, a steep path culminates at The Duke's Pass. Originally built in the 19th Century by the Duke to improve access to his estate, this steep road was subsequently utilised by Victorian tourists after Sir Walter Scott's epic poem The Lady of the Lake put The Trossachs on the map.

Once across, a path continues north-west on a steady ascent up Craigmore's birch-scattered hillside to gain the old tramway, a terrific vantage point to look across Aberfoyle to the Campsie Fells. A final climb ends on the summit of Craigmore and it is only when on this broad crest that the true extent of its outstanding panorama is revealed: Ben Lomond, The Cobbler, Ben More, Stob Binnein, Ben Venue and Loch Ard are particularly prominent while on a clear day the view extends along Flanders Moss to Stirling, its castle and the Wallace Monument.

Descend back to the tramway from where a rough, steep path reaches David Marshall Lodge and a waymarked path back to Aberfoyle.



**Start/Finish:**

Aberfoyle

(GR: NS522009)

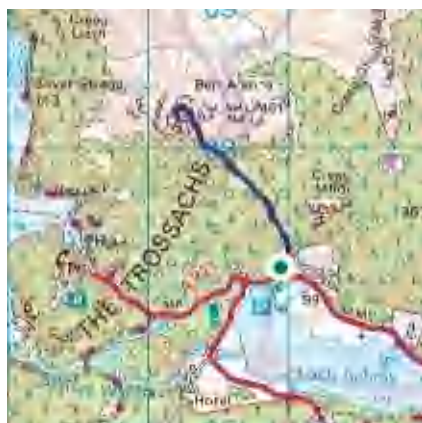
**Time:** 3 hours

**Distance:** 6.5km/4 miles

**Ascent:** 380m/1263ft



The Arrochar Alps  
and Loch Katrine  
from Ben A'an



**Start/Finish:**  
Ben A'an car park  
(GR: NN509070)

**Time:** 2.5 hours

**Distance:**  
3.75km/2.25 miles

**Ascent:** 340m/1115ft

## Ben A'an

Is there a better-known 'wee' hill in Scotland than Ben A'an? It is thought that its name translates, appropriately, as 'small pointed peak' (it was formerly known as Am Binnean until Sir Walter Scott rechristened it in *The Lady of the Lake*) and this is a hill with mountain character from top to toe.

Such is its craggy quality that Ben A'an played an important role in the formative years of mountaineering in Scotland. During the great working class outdoor movement of the 1930s, climbing pioneers such as Jock Nimlin utilised its vertiginous slopes to practice their climbing skills, before hitting the bigger mountains of the West Highlands.

From the Forestry Commission Ben A'an Car Park, two miles west from Brig o' Turk, ascend north through lovely conifer woodland, and then alongside the cascading waters of the Allt Inneir. Keep an eye out for dippers flitting amongst the rocks, and for red squirrels, redstarts and woodpeckers.

In a while the conifers are swapped for beautiful birch woods but when these are left behind the soft terrain is swapped for the seemingly impenetrable slopes of Ben A'an, which rise precipitously above. A clear path heads north through rocky terrain to reach the distinctive topography of the summit, itself marked with a sharp fin of rock.

The view from this pocket-sized peak is awe-inspiring. Below, the glassy waters of Loch Achray and Loch Venachar are framed by the likes of Ben Venue, Ben Ledi and the Menteith Hills. Heading west, the long arm of Loch Katrine draws the eye to the Arrochar Alps and beyond to the fine mountains of the Southern and Central Highlands. The only feasible means of return is by the route of ascent, but with a superb vista and wildlife-rich woodland, it is a joy throughout.

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*Editor's Note: The usual path up Ben A'an is currently out of use while felling takes place and the diversion route is very boggy underfoot.*



# Beinn Dubh & Mid Hill



**Start/Finish:**  
Luss (GR: NS359931)  
**Time:** 4 hours  
**Distance:** 11km/7 miles  
**Ascent:** 670m/2198ft

The Luss Hills are an impressive range of rounded summits, scored by the narrow glens of Douglas, Fruin and Luss. One of the most popular walks ascends over Beinn Dubh and Mid Hill, which, at 657m, is the highest point of the five walks described here. A good portion of the Southern Highlands is on show throughout this lovely route.

Before beginning to climb, it is worth detouring from the large car park in Luss to the beach beside Loch Lomond to admire the superb vista that extends across the loch to Conic Hill and Ben Lomond. From these shores head out of the village, and take the footbridge above the A82. Once past a house go through a gate on the right onto the lower slopes of Beinn Dubh. An excellent little path climbs steadily through a pocket of woodland before continuing up open hillside.

A marvellous outlook opens out very quickly. I like to take a moment here to look out over the vast expanse of Loch Lomond and identify the many islands puncturing the surface of Britain's largest body of fresh water.

One of the largest of these is Inchtavannach, where it is thought the Irish missionary St Kessog settled around 1500 years ago. The story goes that after his death, his body was embalmed in sweet herbs, which supposedly grew and covered his grave, bestowing Luss with its name (from the Gaelic 'lus') meaning herb.

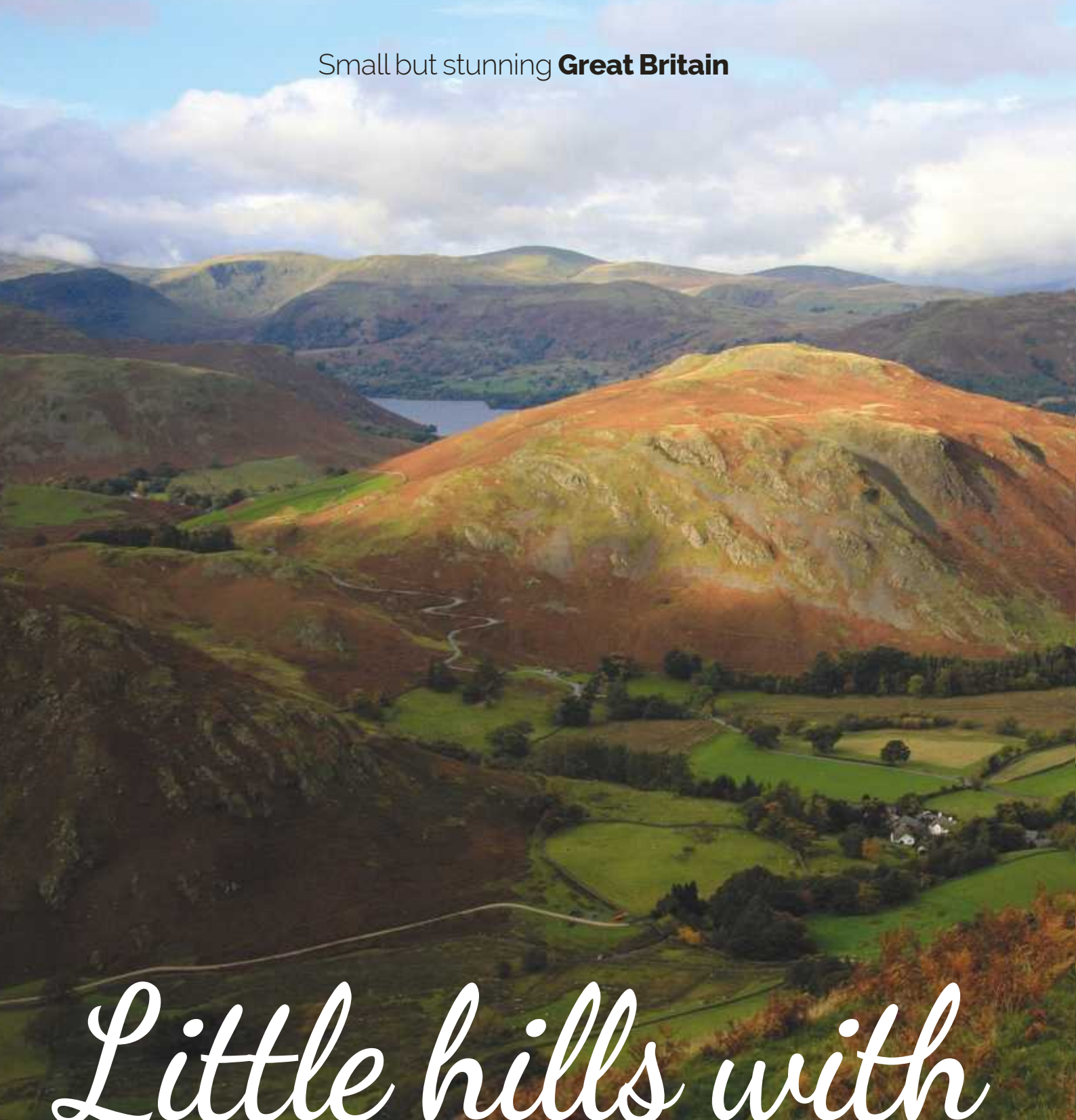
The gradient steepens as the grassy incline reaches Beinn Dubh (The Black Hill) with further superb views on offer, Ben Lomond the dominating presence.

A flatter, sometimes boggy plateau circles the steep flanks of Glen Striddle and onto Mid Hill where that most ubiquitous of upland birds, the skylark is often seen. The brawny, craggy line of the Arrochar Alps is striking from here, even when fantastic mountains like Stob Binnein and Ben More crowd the view. 🏴󠁧󠁢󠁥󠁮󠁧󠁿



Ben Lomond and  
Loch Lomond  
from Beinn Dubh

Small but stunning **Great Britain**



# *Little hills with* **BIG IMPACT**

A summit doesn't have to reach mountain height to be magnificent.  
Here are some of our favourite hills that fail to make the  
2000ft mark but remain utterly unforgettable





## **HALLIN FELL, Lake District (388m)**

Perfectly situated above Howtown bay at the crook of Ullswater, with the beautiful Hallinagh oakwood at its foot, Hallin Fell expects you to work for its summit, marked by a well-built tower, but it rewards you with one of the finest panoramas in England. The view north sweeps from the Scottish border to the Vale of Eden and the Pennine mountains, with the long ridge of the High Street range rising to the east. Shapely Place Fell rises above Boredale to the south, with Helvellyn peeking over its shoulder, and, 10 miles north-west, Blencathra's distinctive profile looms. Most folk take the wide grassy track from the church at the house, but if you're feeling adventurous, the steep scrambly ridge above Watnook offers a longer ascent that feels more aptly mountainous for this fine fell.

## **YR EIFL, Llyn Peninsula (564m)**

The triplet peaks of Yr Eifl or 'the Rivals' – which hang over the Irish Sea on the north coast of the Llyn Peninsula – have plenty to offer. On peak no.3 there's Tre'r Ceiri, meaning 'Town of the Giants', where stone ramparts encircle the remains of around 150 Iron Age huts. Follow one of the nooks between the peaks downhill and you'll find the once long-abandoned village of Nant Gwrtheyrn, on which a curse was supposedly once placed making it destined for decay and ruin - but it's now occupied by a heritage centre! As well as these discoveries, the Rivals offer sweeping views stretching south along Cardigan Bay and north to Anglesey and its Holyhead Mountain.



## **WORCESTERSHIRE BEACON, Malvern Hills (425m)**

Seen from the motorway on long drives to bigger hills, Worcestershire Beacon and its sisters tempt the driver to ditch the satnav and take off through Great Malvern's winding streets before heading steeply up on foot to crest the ridge. Parts of 19 historic counties of England and Wales can be seen from the summit, while paragliders and hungry crows provide entertainment while you eat your sandwiches. The snaking ridgeline of the Malvern Hills really should belong to a mountain range 10 times higher, but here in this corner of England, on a sunny day, a little piece of hillgoing paradise can be found for the price of half an hour's effort. ➡



## Small but stunning

### **SHUTTINGSLOE, Peak District (506m)**

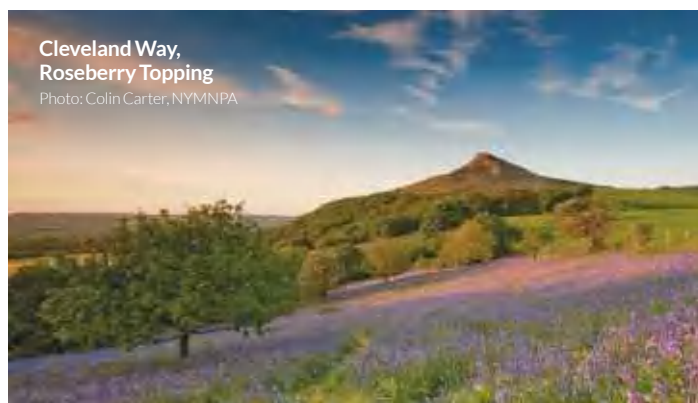
Shutlingsloe, when viewed on an Ordnance Survey map, looks appealingly steep, with the tightly packed orangey-brown contours drawn around the trig point like Munch's Scream. Approaching the 506m mount from the common starting point of Wildboarclough, you can understand its somewhat tongue-in-cheek description as the 'Matterhorn of Cheshire' – a spiky summit protruding out of otherwise rolling moors. The views from the summit are huge, with the county's highest peak, Shining Tor, clearly visible, and on a clear day – apparently – the Clwydian hills of Wales and the radio telescope at Jodrell Bank. But perhaps it's the Cat and Fiddle pub across the valley, the second highest pub in England, that offers a more achievable destination.

### **SUGAR LOAF, Brecon Beacons (596m)**

The Black Mountains area of the Brecon Beacons is mostly occupied by long, bog-topped and somewhat featureless blunt ridges – pinpointing the exact summit on the majority of them can be a challenging task. But then there's the maverick Sugar Loaf. It couldn't be more distinctive; an almost perfectly conical shape with a pointed peak that could take your eye out. From its summit you have a choice of landscapes to marvel at, with the lowland greenery to the south-east or the sandstone curves of the central Beacons in the west.

### **ROSEBERRY TOPPING, North York Moors (320m)**

Another 'Matterhorn', this one Yorkshire's! Roseberry Topping rises as a shapely little cone from the surrounding moors, which are glorious in spring. A National Trust walk starts at Roseberry-under-Topping and makes a clockwise circuit taking in the 320m summit, which commands a 360° panorama of the moors. A stone path on the south side of the hill leads to the little building known as the folly before returning to the start through Newton Wood. ➡



### **LOMOND HILLS, Fife (522m/424m)**

Visible from what seems like half the major summits in Scotland, these not-quite-twin lumps of volcanic dolerite joined by a long flat sedimentary escarpment are unmistakable from a distance and even more so up close, rearing up from the Howe of Fife like two great sphinxes. Wait for a bright calm winter's day and choose short, steep East Lomond above Falkland with the secretive Den of Maspie hiding its treasures below, or take the long gentle stroll along the sphinx's back to West Lomond, Fife's highest point. Sit down and count the snow-capped summits, from Ben Ime to Lochnagar, Schiehallion to Broad Law, Beinn a' Ghlo to Tinto.



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Small but stunning

### **PARED Y CEFN-HIR (383m)**

This pocket rocket of a hill near Barmouth looks remarkably like a dorsal fin when viewed from the far side of the waters of Llynau Cregennen. Its rocky slopes make for some easy and fun scrambling and it will take no time at all to reach its summit to take in the views over to Cadair Idris and the Rhinogydd mountains. The area makes up a Site of Special Scientific Interest thanks to the unique geology found here and there are remains of an Iron Age hillfort to seek out as well.

Photo: Corbis

### **HAY STACKS, Lake District (597m)**

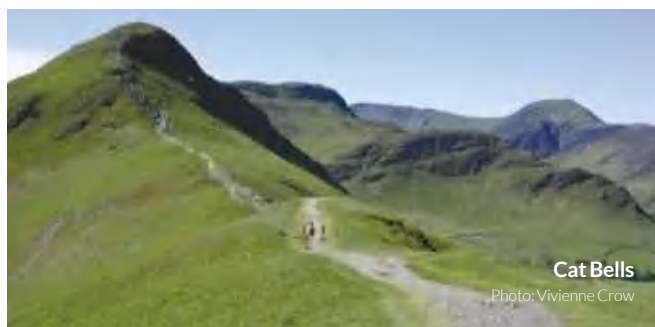
Hay Stacks is renowned as the fell where Alfred Wainwright said he wanted his ashes scattered (in the beautiful Innominat Tarn, near the 597m summit). The usual approach is from the foot of Buttermere, taking the rising path below High Crag to Scarth Gap and on to the top, with its superb views into the heart of the National Park. A pleasant circuit can be enjoyed by returning past Blackbeck Tarn and down to Warnscale Bottom.

### **MAM TOR, Peak District (517m)**

Of all the hills in the High Peak of Derbyshire, it's Mam Tor that has the biggest gravitational pull. It forms part of a popular – rightly so – ridge walk that rises at Lose Hill in the east, and teeters across Hollins Cross to the high point of Mam Tor and onto Lord's Seat, before the mass of gritstone curves north towards Kinder Scout. The rock Mam Tor is built from dates back 320 million years, but it is far from stable. The 'Shivering Mountain' has been beset by landslides for hundreds of years, destroying the road below its steep southern flanks again and again. But it's the instability of Mam Tor, those landslides, that define its striking appearance.

Mam Tor, Castleton

Photo: Rob Bendall



Cat Bells

Photo: Vivienne Crow

### **CAT BELLS, Lake District (451m)**

We could blame Mrs Tiggywinkle or proximity to the fleshpots of Keswick for the enduring popularity of this much-loved (some say over-loved) fell, but could it be that the masses actually have some taste? The penultimate lump on the Newlands ridge, Cat Bells' distinctive camel's back profile cannot be ignored, and the ascent along the ridge is just rugged enough to be satisfying while short enough for a quick afternoon jaunt. The view's not bad either: on a very clear and cold day, White Coomb is reputedly just visible some 60 miles away to the north in the Southern Uplands, while the nearer neighbours of Lakeland's Northern and Western fells make a fine backdrop for Derwent Water's perfect prettiness.

### **PENDLE HILL, Lancashire (557m)**

Pendle Hill is one of those great hulking lumps of rock that is imbued with much more character even than its dramatic topography suggests. It rises from the south-west, alone and proud out of the Forest of Bowland AONB, reaching the sharp eastern summit at 557m, before plummeting back through the glacial sediment and disappearing without trace in the Lancashire landscape. Yet it is the human history that defines this hill. The 1612 witch trials accused a dozen people living around Pendle Hill of murder by witchcraft. Ten were hanged. It's also where George Fox, founder of the Quakers, had a vision. For most, it's the vast visions over the Pennines that are the earthly reason for a visit. ▀



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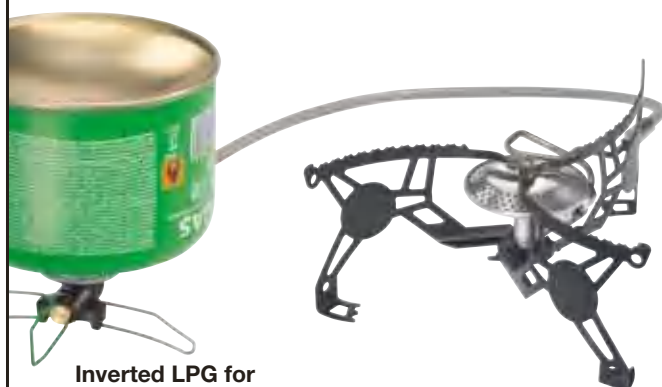


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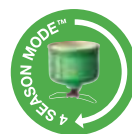
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# Beneath the Blue

Can you have a big mountain experience abroad without using a plane? Of course you can, says *Carey Davies*



The Cirque de  
Gavarnie from the  
pastures above  
Gavarnie village

IT WAS ONE of those moments to linger in. I was looking down on a world that contained no visible trace of humanity for hundreds of miles. A perfect sea of cloud washed up against peaks of rugged red granite standing proud like survivors of a Biblical deluge, obscuring any evidence of civilisation below. An unbroken vault of blue stretched above me, darkening to indigo as it shaded into space. I was enjoying the sort of angel's perspective you usually get from the window of an aircraft – but to reach this point I hadn't set foot on a plane or braved a single in-flight meal.

To get here I had travelled for more than a thousand miles at the level of the land, and this peak was the highest I would go. There was something satisfying about realising that the apex of my journey was self-powered. It seemed the way it should be, somehow.

I was on the 10,000ft-high summit of Petit Vignemale, one of the few 'walking' peaks in the glaciated Vignemale massif, the highest mountain in the French Pyrenees. Savouring the sort of rare moment I probably wouldn't experience again until who knows when, something in the infinity above me caught my eye. Miles above, two white specks were gliding through the blue with an odd air of weightlessness, like spacecraft. They gradually converged. It looked like a tanker and a smaller plane, refuelling mid-flight. Neither was producing a vapour trail, and I realised why the sky looked so impossibly pristine; the atmospheric conditions weren't right for those long streaks that usually inscribe the sky with the sign of human presence.

I pondered what the sky has meant to humanity through the ages. Medieval scholars believed it was a heavenly

firmament in which angels jostled together with the sun and stars. After a lifetime striving to capture the mystery of light in our cloud-crowded British skies, Turner came to believe the sun was god. We owe the constellations we see in the stars to the ancient Babylonians, who looked up at the night sky and saw lions, eagles, bulls and warriors.

Now we know better: the sky is a vast holiday motorway, streaked with contrails and stuffed with Easyjet flights. At any one time there are about 600,000 people in the firmament on around 3,000 planes. That equates to more than 100,000 flights per day, or almost 37 million flights a year. And that's only the tip of the iceberg; developing countries like China and India are currently only responsible for a fraction of the air travel 'we' are, but that is sure to rise precipitously in the years to come.

It was statistics like these that made me reappraise my attitude to flying. I say this very much as a sky-sinner. The carbon cost of flying has always been something I was dimly aware of, but dismissed with the usual self-serving justifications. I have taken up to 18 flights in the space of a year before (some for work, but still). Earlier this year, though, I was idly pondering taking a trip to New Zealand when I realised the carbon cost of doing

so exceeded the amount I consume in my flat in a whole year. I wondered why I bother recycling, fiddling with the thermostat and being picky about lights left on when I am so blasé about flying. If we accept the notion that only a finite amount of carbon can be burned to avert or even curb runaway climate chaos, is it really justifiable to fly so frivolously, to jump on planes for trivial distances? We relatively affluent westerners are some of the most prolific carbon-consumers, with a disproportionately large impact, yet we also have the most options at our disposal to do things differently.

And in any case, isn't there something a bit weird about the way we mountain-loving folk experience far-flung wild places? An alien observing our holiday rituals would be very perplexed. We get blasted into the stratosphere in polluting machines, touch down, and then huff and puff up to a lesser altitude under our own steam, while proclaiming our sensitivity to nature. Surely there must be a less dissonant way of doing things?

So this summer I decided to conduct an experiment. I wanted to go abroad, to somewhere big, spectacular and exotic-feeling. I had less than a week to spare. I didn't have a lot of money. Within these confines, I wondered, was it possible to avoid hurtling off the end of a runway?



[right] Marvelling at a perfect cloud inversion from the Petit Vignemale (3032m);

[opposite] Sunrise over the Petit Vignemale





## I realised why the sky looked so impossibly pristine; the atmospheric conditions weren't right for those long streaks that usually inscribe it with the sign of human presence

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The Eurostar departure lounge was slowly filling with inconvenienced people, and there threatened to be the sort of British mutiny that happens in such situations – an outbreak of arm-crossing and tutting. The departure board looked like a bad exam paper, full of cancellations, crossing-outs and changed numbers.

If I'd opted to travel by train to massage my conscience, I'd picked a bad day for it. The people in Calais whose plight the media had feasted on for the whole summer were trying to get into the tunnel again, causing train cancellations while the police corralled them back into their 'jungle'. "Nothing a

shotgun wouldn't sort out," muttered the otherwise pleasant-seeming Welsh woman next to me, reflecting the open-minded compassion that had characterised most of the media coverage. Our train, it turned out, was one of the few that was unaffected. "Looks like you won't be needing your shotgun," I muttered back as we got up to make our way to the platform.

A blink of an eye later I was in Paris, the lottery of birth allowing me to cross borders easily. A ride on the metro took me across the city, where I boarded a TGV train that ferried me across nearly the whole length of the country in a smooth five hours, the land

all broad plains and green rivers, the sky an endless armada of clouds sailing in a sea of blue. In the evening I stepped out on to the streets of Lourdes, where I was met with the vague aroma of incense I always think, or maybe imagine, permeates Mediterranean countries. It took a bit longer than a flight would have, but it was enjoyable and interesting, and made the idea of using a plane to get here seem totally unnecessary. I spent the evening marvelling at light-up Virgin Marys and waving pope figurines in the local gift shops and stayed in the 'Mother Theresa' room in a guesthouse that had its own Catholic shrine. 

It was an odd sort of inversion; a strange high-altitude

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The next day dawned damp and full of incontinent cloud. I took a 45-minute bus ride from Lourdes to the nearby mountain resort of Cauterets, winding up into forest-lined gorges with pieces of crag and cliff occasionally leering out from the clag. From Cauterets I walked up a path through dripping pine forest to the Pont d'España, then through intermittent pine, pasture and rocky glacial wreckage to the Refuge Wallon. It was a nice walk, memorable for its surging, spectacular waterfalls, but the mountains I knew were all around me remained in the realm of the hypothetical. The rambling Refuge Wallon was a large, well-worn French Alpine Club-owned complex with peeling walls, draughty corridors and rather nonplussed wardens, but filling food and

awe and apprehension, I saw impregnable-looking, saw-toothed granite mountains frowning down on me from all sides, and suddenly I felt very small.

It was an odd sort of inversion, though; another layer of cloud sat above at the level of the mountain tops, leaving me in an envelope of clear air between them. The lower layer was pushing up from the French valleys, the higher one bearing down over the tops from Spain. It was only the second time in my life I've experienced this strange high-altitude limbo, like being sandwiched between two skies.

The border between France and Spain is superimposed on the dark, rocky Col d'Aratiles, and I crossed it to the sound of wheezing coughs and hail on my hood. Naturally, the political line felt essentially

boulders littering the floor of the hanging valley hinted at the scale of the massif they'd tumbled from. Feeling slightly despondent at the weather, I went into the pleasant refuge and warmed my hands around a bowl of coffee. Just as I walked back outside, the scene suddenly lifted, revealing a staggering view of the Vignemale. It was truly Alpine in scale and sublimity, vast limestone buttresses looming out from under a brooding brow of cloud. But while the glaciated patches clinging to the massif were impressive in their own way, it was clear to see they were a shadow of their former selves, the last, dirty brown remnant of a structure which once bulged right into the valley only a hundred years ago. This canary of climate change was dying and on its last gasp.

## limbo, like being sandwiched between two skies

friendly company. It could accommodate over a hundred people but at the tail end of the randonneur season felt echoingly empty, with less than a dozen guests. The murk remained when I woke the next day; only the tinkling sounds from the nearby pastures and the rushing noise of the waterfalls suggested I was somewhere spectacular.

But the forecast, which my French abilities hadn't really stretched to, mentioned something happening at around the 2000 to 2500m mark. At about 10.30 in the morning, just below the Lac d'Aratiles, I realised what it was. A herd of goats scattering noisily in front of me coincided with a sudden brightening, and in an instant I found myself surfacing above a cloud inversion. With a mixture of

meaningless in this lonely environment, except for a rather functional French National Park sign forbidding litter and camping and such. I spent exactly one hour in Spain, following the route of the GR10 across a scree slope under the jagged Pic Né. The cloud lifted briefly, peeling away in ragged ribbons to expose a bruising Spanish peak that looked like Bidean nam Bian's big sister, before a stiff climb up to the Col des Mules took me back into France, and another mundane information board.

After descending to the Refuge des Oulettes, I was now technically within sight of the highest mountain in the French Pyrenees, the 3298m (10,802ft) Vignemale, but everything was still shrouded in cloud. Only a field of vast

The spectacle briefly distracted me from the fact that I still had a punishing 700m climb ahead of me as a finale to an already demanding day. The haul up to the Hourquette d'Ossoue was pretty grim stuff, done in a claggy purgatory with plenty of profane mumbling. Things did briefly clear up at the col to give me an up-close view of the Vignemale massif, but I arrived at Refuge Baysellance in dense cloud, shattered after a day which had seen me cross three mountain passes and accumulate about 1,400 metres of ascent. At 2651m (8697ft) this compact but well-run refuge is one of the highest, oldest and busiest in the whole range, but in the spitting cloud I grumpily felt like I might as well have been in the Pennines as the Pyrenees.



[left] Waterfalls and moody weather near Oulettes de Vignemale;

[opposite, main] Mountains appear in an envelope of clear air from near the the Lac d'Aratiles;

[opposite, left] A glacial stream in the Massif de Vignemale

[opposite, right] The massif de Vignemale and its dying glaciers

I slept poorly that night, and pulled myself out of the bunk some time before dawn. Cradling a coffee in the busy dining room, I noticed faint shapes beginning to resolve from the darkness outside. Mountains! I walked groggily outside, grabbing my down jacket on the way, to see an incredible world of blue-black peaks under a gradually lightening sky, the valley below asleep under a perfectly still blanket of cloud. I stood there in the freezing air and watched the dawn gradually unfold, delicate violet light dabbing the cloud, eventually turning orange and lighting the surrounding peaks like huge beacons. The famous Cirque de Gavarnie rose from the 'shore' of the cloud sea several miles away, its rippling vastness sugar-dusted with layers of snow.

I left my big pack in the refuge to climb the Petit Vignemale, marvelling at the cloud inversion which seemed to cover the whole of France and Spain, before returning to the refuge, collecting my bag and heading down into the valley as the cloud blanket began lifting to let the hot sun stream down. It took me five or six enchanted hours to walk to Gavarnie, the valley vibrant with butterflies, wild flowers, marmots and vultures, the waterfalls loud and spectacular, the river clear and cold when I took an electrifying swim.

The daytime crowds of tourists were leaving Gavarnie just as I arrived. It felt appealingly old-fashioned to walk into a town and look for lodgings. By then, late cloud hung over the valley, and the spectacle that lay at its head was partially obscured. But the next morning dawned bright and sunny, and I walked out to a gobsmacking spectacle.

Imagine Malham Cove if it was five or six times the size. Place it surrounding a valley. Then create a structure roughly twice the size of that, and stick it on top so it surrounds the first layer. Then construct an amphitheatre twice the size of that again and layer it behind the first two gigantic tiers. Create a ring of mountains to top it all off. Then partially suck the whole thing into a black hole, convulsing a whole flank of the structure so it surges and swells and ripples and warps into the most impossible undulations. Add a few glaciers to the top then liberally sprinkle it with waterfalls hundreds of metres high. You have something approaching the Cirque de Gavarnie.

Beyond baroque in its complexity and scale, the Cirque de Gavarnie is so huge it renders you not only speechless but thoughtless. There is something almost meditative in its massiveness; it silences the mind, effortlessly commanding your entire

attention. I walked with crowds of tourists into the embrace of the cirque before leaving them behind to scramble up the exhilarating l'Echelle des Sarradets, an improbable chink in the cirque's armour, the white sound of waterfalls as loud and hypnotic as the sea. Every time I looked at the cirque I went into a sort of trance, mesmerised by its tumultuous forms, like getting lost in great music.

A hanging gorge filled with the noise of goats' bells reverberating off the walls of limestone like slow, melancholy steel drums took me to the foot of the famous Breche du Roland, its accompanying refuge busy with

hikers and climbers. I descended through scree and boulders into the Vallée des Pouey Aspé, where the crowds disappeared again, and the Cirque de Gavarnie loomed back into view. I sat in the shade of a juniper bush and watched indescribably beautiful tendrils of cloud creep over the cirque as the sun set. Eventually I became insensible with joy, purged by the moment and completely disencumbered of life's horrors, big and small. The next day I boarded a bus, swapped the mountains for the bright Atlantic seaboard for a day or two, and then took the long return journey back across land, a renewed man. ▀







## HOW TO GET TO THE PYRENEES BY TRAIN

You might need a bit more time to travel to the Pyrenees by train, but the experience itself can be rewarding, and if booked in advance can easily compete with the low cost of flying thanks to France's superb network of TGV trains. Here's the journey broken down.

- Get to London, if you aren't already there.
- Take the Eurostar ([www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)) to Paris (2 hrs 15 mins).
- You may need to transfer in Paris, eg from Gare du Nord to Montparnasse (20 mins on subway).
- Take a TGV train ([www.sncf.com](http://www.sncf.com)) to Lourdes (5–5.5 hrs).
- Take a bus from outside the train station to Cauterets (30–40 mins).
- Walk!

**Guidebook:** Kev Reynolds, *Walks and climbs in the Pyrenees* (Cicerone: [www.cicerone.co.uk](http://www.cicerone.co.uk))

**Maps:** France IGN 1647 OT (Vignemale) and Gavarnie (1748 OT) ([www.stanfords.co.uk](http://www.stanfords.co.uk))

*With thanks to Kev Reynolds and Andy Howell for their helpful advice.*

[above] The tumultuous limestone forms of the Cirque de Gavarnie have to be seen to be believed;

[opposite, top] Sunrise over the Cirque de Gavarnie from the Refuge de Baysellance;

[opposite, bottom] Limestone waterfalls below the Massif de Vignemale

# ● ED BYRNE ● TRIES

## MOUNTAIN TV

*The sun always shines on TV, right?  
Not so much, says Ed*

I've been into mountains for a while. Having eschewed any form of physical activity throughout all of my twenties and a good chunk of my thirties, my outdoor career could be said to have bloomed a little late, but over the last few years I've been making up for lost time.

My relationship with TV started much earlier. Beginning with a four-minute stand-up routine on *Australia's Hey Hey! It's Saturday!* back in 1996, I've been on and off the telly for nearly 20 years now and the mixture of quality programmes and utter hogwash I've been involved in has meant my TV career has had as many ups and downs as my hillwalking one.

Lately, there has been a certain amount of talk of combining these two facets of my life and making some sort of mountaineering or outdoor adventure show. For the most part, it has just been talk. Apart from showing up on Skye in an episode of the BBC's *Three Men in a*

*Boat* and a brief slide down a Nicaraguan volcano in *Dara and Ed's Great Big Adventure*, efforts to bring my love of high places to the screen have very much remained at the "talking to enthusiastic producers" stage of development.

In the last month, however, I've had the opportunity to be a part of two different productions, occupying opposite ends of the outdoors-filming spectrum. One was the upcoming *Blencathra: Life of a Mountain* by the gifted amateur and thoroughly independent filmmaker Terry Abraham. The other was the hugely successful, flagship documentary series, *Countryfile*, produced by the much beloved, hugely respected, hulking behemoth that is the BBC. Obviously, there were big differences in the size of crew involved and the time taken to film these pieces but there were also striking similarities, the main one being the manner in which inclement weather hampered our efforts.

The Inaccessible  
Pinnacle? A doddle!  
[right] Not sure this  
is such a good idea



© BBC / Photo by Matt Smith





© BBC / Photo by Matt Smith

## *To the In Pinn!*

From January *Countryfile* will feature a new strand in which celebrities show the viewers a place in the countryside that is special to them in some way. Being considered to have achieved “celebrity” status I was asked if I’d fancy taking part, and knowing that I had a fondness for Munro-bagging they suggested I might like to do a segment on that. Straightaway I suggested the Cuillin Ridge and the Innaccessible Pinnacle. The In Pinn had loomed large in my mind since I first started down the road of Munroism and the fact that it was considered the only top where ropework was deemed essential, gave it a unique quality worthy of the BBC’s attention.

The shoot, handily enough, came just after I finished at the Edinburgh Fringe. I had my last show on Sunday night. Monday morning I packed up my stuff and drove to Skye to meet the crew. There was a director, a cameraman, a safety adviser (in charge of roping up the cameraman) a researcher and a soundman. As we were chatting about the following day’s shoot I learned that the soundman, Brian, had been the soundman for Muriel Gray when she did the In Pinn some 25 years earlier for her Munro Show: the programme that first inspired me to take up Munro-bagging as a hobby.

I was informed that the weather forecast indicated that Wednesday would be our best bet for summiting and so we would just film my interview and some general landscape walking shots on Tuesday.

Tuesday dawned unsettled but mostly clear. I spoke earnestly and, I hope, humorously, on camera about my love of Scottish mountains. We met up with our guide, Martin Moran, and hiked up to Coire Lagan. Along the way, we stopped frequently. The camera would then be set up ahead of me and I would walk past it. Sometimes I would be left sitting for nearly an hour while they hiked ahead. I’d wait with a walkie talkie for my signal to follow on. It all felt so silly and so unlike a normal hill-walk. At Coire Lagan we filmed some more chat and some sweeping vistas, then called it a day, for the filming at least. I wasn’t coming out of all this without ticking off a summit, so Martin and I scrambled up the Great Stone Chute and bagged the top of Sgurr Alasdair.

The next day the weather was lousy. Of course it was: how could it not be? We had two days to film. We were told which one would be best so, of course, that was





Skye is a pretty special place

© BBC / Photo by Matt Smith

*This was a typical TV moment, where you shake hands with a person you've been with all day and pretend the two of you have just met*

always going to be the day when the wind picked up and the rain lashed down. By the time we got to the base of the In Pinn, I was pretty much soaked to the skin, but that wasn't the reason I started to shiver. Having had the Inaccessible Pinnacle described to me, I wasn't expecting something of such height. From our initial vantage point it looked horribly forbidding and I started to get the willies.

The next thing we did was film me meeting up with Martin. This was a typical TV moment, where you shake hands with a person you've been with all day and pretend the two of you have just met. In the course of chatting about the climb, I asked Martin if there was any reason why he might call it off. He said that if the wind got over 40 miles an hour it would be a safety issue and we might have to abort. "Let's hope it doesn't come to that," I said, not sure if I really meant it.

Our climb, which Martin told me would normally take about an hour, took a shade over three hours to do. The most time-consuming part was getting the camera up there, trying to get their ropes out of our way, climbing past the camera, then waiting for the camera to reposition. All the while, the wind was trying to whip us off the mountain and I could barely hear Martin's instructions. The most challenging part was trying not to swear (this was *Countryfile* after all) while trying to reach handholds I couldn't see because the gale-force winds were making my eyes water.

The relief when I finally reached the top was palpable. After the abseil down, I asked Martin what speed he reckoned the winds were while we were on the ridge. "I'd say they were about 40mph," he said. "So, about the speed at which you said we'd call it off?" I replied. He at least had the good grace to look sheepish.



## COUNTRYFILE

- *Countryfile* has been broadcast since 1988.
- The programme's audience figures are often above 8 million – making it one of the most popular factual programmes in Britain.
- The team films all-year-round in all conditions (as Ed discovered...) and broadcasts 52 weeks of the year.

## THE INACCESSIBLE PINNACLE

- The 'In Pinn' is the high point of the Munro of Sgurr Dearg on the Cuillin ridge of Skye.
- Sgurr Dearg is the only Munro which requires rock climbing skills.
- Danny MacAskill's YouTube film *The Ridge*, in which he takes his mountain bike onto the In Pinn, was viewed 14m times the week it was put online.



## On Blencathra

A far more sedate time was had filming *Blencathra: Life of a Mountain*, with mountain auteur Terry Abraham. His first feature about Scafell was a huge success and a great achievement for a self-taught amateur. The writer and broadcaster Stuart Maconie had popped up in that and Terry was keen for Stuart and I to do something together for the Blencathra film.

It was decided we would tackle Sharp Edge, guided by the same man who had guided Julia Bradbury along it for her *Wainwright Walks* show, David Powell-Thompson.

For this shoot, the people on screen would outnumber the people behind the camera. Terry was director, camera and sound. His mate Dan assisted him by lugging stuff about and acting as a second cameraman.

I've been a fan of Stuart Maconie's for a while and had spent a very pleasant evening drinking and chatting with him at the Latitude Festival a few years previously. We had made half-hearted attempts to go hillwalking together in the past but had never been able to get our diaries to coincide, so I was thrilled that we were getting to go out on the hill together.

Compared to the BBC shoot, things were much easier. We hiked up to Scales Tarn where we pretended to meet David. (Some conventions are universal.) A quick chat on camera about the climb ahead

and then we were off... to wait around for the wind to drop. You see, as well as his skeleton crew, Terry had decided to also call in a drone camera team to film us as we climbed. Unfortunately, the wind wouldn't permit the £60,000 worth of flying camera equipment to leave the ground.

The lot of us started along Sharp Edge. After the In Pinn, I don't mind saying I found it a doddle. I tried not to gloat or make too much of Stuart's obvious discomfort on the more exposed parts but sometimes pride got the better of me. Again we waited for a while for the wind to die down but it was not to be. The drone team would have to come back another day. We finished the climb, Terry making do with hand-held camera shots, and then it was back to the pub for a lively debate about the decentralisation of the BBC.

It's fair to say that I've learned a lot about the techniques used in mountain filming over recent weeks. But I think the most enlightening thing I've learned is that it really sucks the fun out of hillwalking! Perhaps it's best I keep my two separate careers just that: separate. ▲

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The *Countryfile* episode featuring Ed Byrne on the In Pinn will be broadcast early in 2016.

The premiere of *Life of a Mountain: Blencathra* will be broadcast at 7pm on Saturday 14 May 2016 on the IMAX screen at the Rheged Centre near Penrith. The film will be available on DVD soon afterwards.



### TERRY ABRAHAM

- Nearly a million viewers tuned in to watch Terry's film, *Life of a Mountain: Scafell Pike*, when it was broadcast on BBC4.
- Terry's other films include *The Cairngorms in Winter* and *Backpacking in the Lake District*, both featuring TGO's gear editor and backpacking expert Chris Townsend.

### BLENCATHRA

- Blencathra made headlines when it was put up for sale in 2014. A community group, Friends of Blencathra, raised funds to put in a bid but we still await news of its new owners.



Clockwise from back  
left: Terry, Stuart,  
Dan, Ed and David







# ISLANDS TO



# HIGHLANDS

David Lintern takes to the water to reach the  
inaccessible Munros of Mullardoch

View down Loch  
Mullardoch from  
the south side



Looking back towards the concrete wall of the dam, eerily still; [right] The ruins of old growth cling to the lochside, while above regeneration blooms; [far right, top] A guilty bogwood fire – barely keeping legions of midges at bay! [far right, bottom] Millpond calm on Loch Mullardoch

▶ I didn't have much of a plan, just a few pages of OS mapping I'd printed off a few weeks before. There had been a fair few postponements of late. But I knew what I didn't know – the area west of Cannich, and that I wanted to use my packraft on a big loch to access some really remote hills. Something I'd not tried before, in a place new to me. So the plan evolved on the fly, and that meant deciding to paddle up the loch now, rather than down it, later. Since I'd been up since 5am and the water was millpond calm when I arrived, it seemed the sensible option.

My first challenge was to paddle across Loch Mullardoch... in at the deep end! Even in perfect conditions, without much experience on big bodies of water, this was intimidating. I edged out into the middle, turning to face the solid wall of concrete holding me in place, experiencing a kind of deep vertigo, very aware I was in a single-chamber vessel and the water underneath went a long way down.

Safely close to shore on the south side, I paddled gently west, mesmerised by the quiet, occasionally

squinting up at the trees starkly outlined in bright sunshine. I'd spent the last three months in a spin, suffering from sleepless nights brought on by a change of work and new fatherhood. I breathed out consciously, and felt myself relax a little more into the trip. I find packrafting just as effective at unraveling the travails of everyday existence as any other form of self-powered travel.

Dead trees dotted the water's edge, the skeletons of bogwood exposed by water erosion and trees cut down when the loch was flooded. The loch is littered with their corpses, dissonance thrown into the mix of an otherwise wild-feeling place. Further along the shoreline, there's cliff, boulder, tree, implacable rock. Civilisation receded – I could barely make out the huge dam wall now. But at the western end, it was empty, stripped of tree cover, barren.

There's a different rhythm on a loch to a river. I practised my stroke, using my body and not my arms to pull the craft through the water. I stopped often to take photos, spin the boat and lean back, and explore inlets





onshore. As the day progressed a headwind picked up, and my lazy exploration transformed into something more determined and energetic. I relished the exercise, after hours cooped up in the car and at the desk.

I spotted an island on the map I hadn't noticed before. I was still undecided of my final plans as I pushed north once more to visit. On the lee side, it was heavily carpeted with moss and heather, but on the other there were small clearings in-between scrubby birch and alder.

I climbed aboard my home for the evening, explored and found a flat pitch for the tarp. I guiltily made a bogwood fire, not wanting to disturb what little sustenance and cover it provided for wildlife, but needing to keep the biting wildlife at bay as the wind dropped to a whisper. What was it like here before the dam? It's entirely possible that this island was only raised ground, and not an island at all. What about the settlement buried under all that water? Meanwhile, the shores of my island, like the shores on all sides, were fragile, mobile, the soil bleached white and rinsed thin by the rising and falling of water. ➡

## POWER FROM THE GLENS

Mullardoch is the largest concrete dam in Scotland, and was built in 1951 as part of the huge post-war expansion of hydroelectric power. It dams the River Cannich and is part of the Beaully-Affric system, which also draws power from the adjacent glens of Strathfarrar and Monar. Despite being the largest, and Loch Mullardoch reservoir being a massive 10 miles long, its power output is relatively modest in comparison to others, possibly because its principal job is to divert water via a tunnel into Loch Benevean and on to Fasnakyle Power Station.

James Miller's brilliantly researched piece of aural history, *The Dam Builders: Power from the Glens* (Birlinn 2002), describes how most of the work was carried out by foreign labour, often from Ireland and Poland. Wodek Majewski remembers the tunneling work on the Mullardoch project as testing, but well paid at the time. "The tunnel was quite big and there were these big, heavy machines, Drifters they called them, that needed two men to lift... We were going three steps forward and two back... Drill bits broke a few times. I nearly killed one chap. The bit just snapped. Too much pressure."

## Mullardoch Munros



[top left] The day dawned still and loud with the hum of tiny, biting insects; [bottom left] The strangest stretch of the trip – paddling blind towards the ruins at Am Mam; [right] The last stretch of the heavy pull up to An Socach

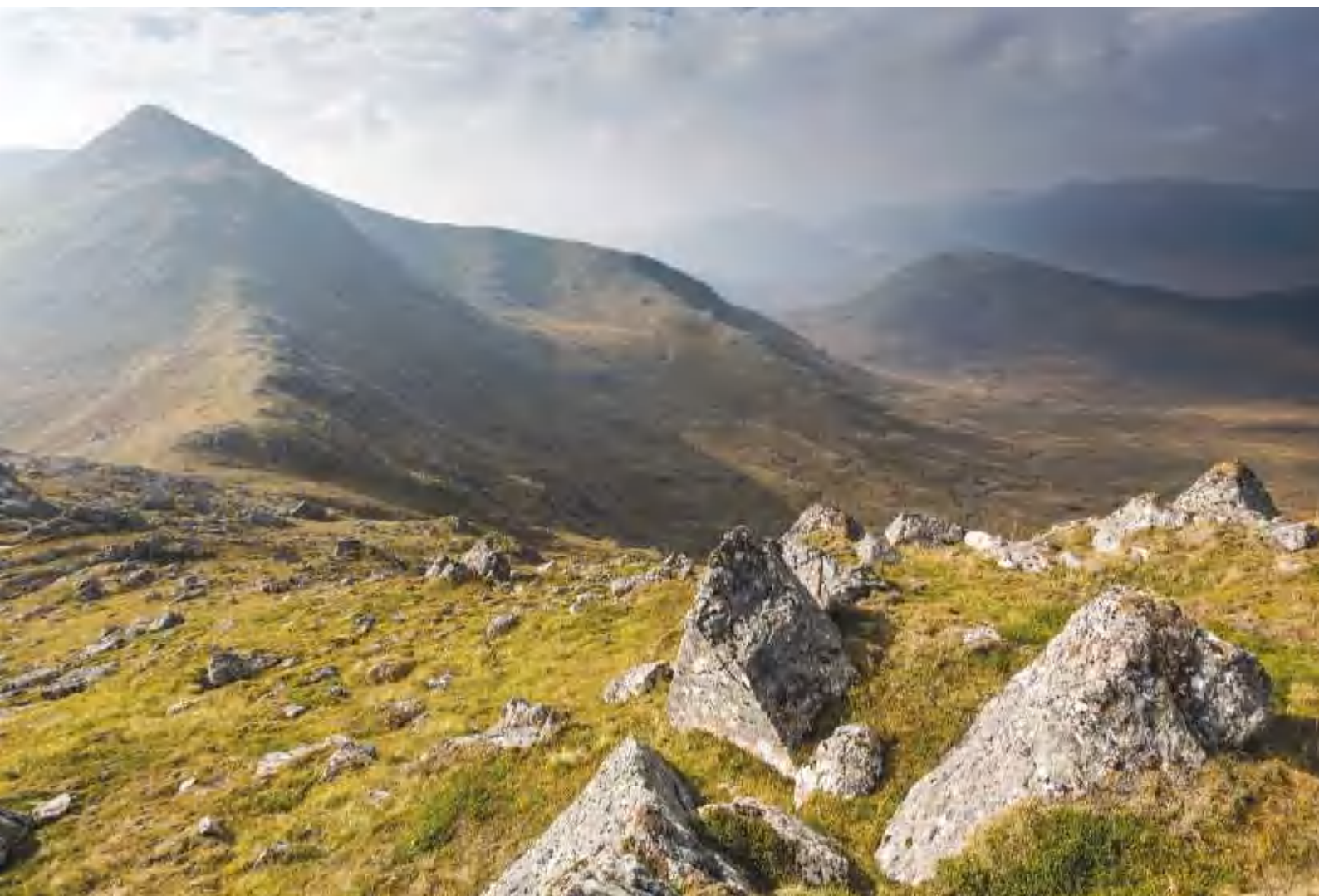
In the morning, it's positively riven with midges. I awake to their hum, lying still in my bivi for 40 minutes before bracing myself for the inevitable quick strike and relocating to the rocks to relight the fire. After a harried breakfast, I push off into the unknown. The mists hug the lake; I paddle into a horizonless abyss, features swimming in and out of the murk, a silent and surreal wet desert. I pass mudflats festooned with many more headless tree stumps in silent congregation. Have I passed over into the underworld, is this the Styx? Cocooned in my floating reverie, it seems to me that if the plants and animals could talk, they would describe us as gods, monstrous terraformers of limitless power and limited mercy.

With some relief, I see the ruins of Am Mam, perhaps once a croft or stalkers cabin, emerge from the fog. I collect water, make tea, and pack down the boat. As I do so, the mists slowly begin to clear. The underworld evaporates, and I'm on solid ground again. I have rafted my pack. It's now time to pack my raft.

Reaching the top of An Socach takes nearly two hours. A deflated packraft and accessories are relatively light in the scheme of things – about 3.5kg – but it's slow going in the heat of the morning with an inversion still lapping at my feet. Still, how else would I have got here? On the rough path that follows the north side of the loch, or by motorised ferryboat. And would I have traded the weirdness and wonder of the Styx and my island camp for that? Not a chance!

An Socach is not so much a hill as a beautifully remote coire decorated with a giant piecrust. I stop for lunch on the summit, and snooze a little while the grasses sway in the sun. Out of one eye, I focus on my route home – back east, over the tops. The very last of the cloud, now just a diaphanous veil, barely grazes a distant summit. The next 26 hours are spent on a fine ridge walk, with my paddle poles whistling in the wind like milk bottles or the soundtrack to a Samurai movie. I zen out and relax my pace, but it's a long way from the nearest road up here, and I'm aware I've been incredibly lucky with the weather.





[above] Wonderful autumn light on the north Mullardoch ridge; [below] A perfect high, wild camp at the bealach between Creagan Toll an Lochain and Sgurr na Lapaich

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Silence. Just the burn carving a line  
down the hillside, and the stags  
calling their readiness to mate  
in the middle distance

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Later I pitch at the bealach, and thankfully the midges leave along with the warmth of the sun. Sitting doing nothing takes patience, and practice. I am still out of the latter, but remember the former. Once again, it takes me a while to slow down... then stop... to appreciate where I am. Silence. Just the burn carving a line down the hillside, the stags calling their readiness to mate in the middle distance. And a gentle breeze as night falls, between cool and cold. I brew tea, pick up my notepad and watch, as the present moment edges by. ➤





An atmospheric descent from the giant Sgurr na Lapaich

A chilly, dull beginning, the cloud diffuse and hazy. I awake to two more stags in the corrie, their harem clattering about on the rocks above me. I'm only half out of my bag when a raven misjudges its landing and narrowly misses the shelter. A ptarmigan chatters a few metres away. Silence returns. Rock and moss. I notice the remains of the insects glued to the tarp from yesterday's island evacuation. You know it's bad when they form a sort of morbid paté on your shelter.

I pass over the burly, 1150m summit of Sgurr na Lapaich in the fog, but I'm fully rested and it seems little effort today, especially since I started from a col at 820m.

Lower down, I bounce along springy tundra dry as tinder, with grey wagtails and wheatears darting among glacial debris, the perfect basecamp for another adventure, maybe next time with another boat and the family.

I make good time, extending my walk out to Creag Dhubh to spy a huge herd of deer just off the summit, and then it's time to come off. The hard way of course,

since I've not taken the more obvious route from Carn nan Gobhar, which means finding a route through the steep rocks of Creag Feusag. I don't recommend this option, although as ever, the deer paths steer me right in the end. I assume few other souls have gone through here, it feels so wild and remote. This place is theirs; I'm only passing through, sweating in the afternoon haze.

Mullardoch was only a short trip, but very sweet. An adventure on my own terms, sometimes full of wonder, sometimes disconcerting, but nevertheless, all mine. There's no doubt that travelling with a boat is more fussy than not – blowing it up, letting it down, securing it to the bag or the bag to the boat – the paraphernalia of life vest, boat knife, straps and buckles. But if you haven't tried it yet, I wholeheartedly recommend it. Yes, it takes a little time to set up, but the rewards – a feeling of genuine exploration completely under one's own steam – are immense. How else could I sleep on an island one night, and a hilltop the next? ▢





Elf island (in my mind, anyway...) also known as Loch Tuill Bhearnach

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## POWER AND RESISTANCE: THEN AND NOW

The Highlands may appear to the casual visitor to be a haven of peace and tranquility, but were and still are a battleground for power, in both the literal and figurative sense. For those interested in the march of wind turbines across the contemporary Highlands, it's interesting to note that there was also considerable resistance to the big damming schemes at the time. Mary Grant condemned the Affric-Beaully hydro-electric scheme in her letter to the Inverness Courier as a product of a "grossly materialistic age". Naturalist Seton Gordon warned of the loss of bird habitats caused by starving rivers of water.

Mountaineer WH Murray will be a familiar name to many readers. In his 1962 survey for the National Trust for Scotland, which arguably laid the early foundations for Scottish Natural Heritage's recent 'wild land map', he mourned the destruction of Glen Garry woodland, and was especially critical of the pylons thrown up as a result of the hydro developments. In other places, he argued that roads had been sensitively laid, and that some lochs were even an improvement. But what has become normalised now was heavily debated and contested then, and undoubtedly a way of life was lost forever.

The damming of the River Cannich flooded the glen upriver and joined two natural lochs – Mullardoch and Lungard, as well as submerging the Beinn Fionnlaidh lodge, two stalkers' cottages and a small settlement at Lungard. As a condition of their license to build, the hydro board promised to restore the rights of way between Kintail, Glen Affric and Cannich that existed before the dam, but modern day visitors will find the drove road, old or new, still lacking! As a consequence, the most practical way to access these remote hills is by boat – either one's own, in the form of a kayak or packraft, or by using the ferry service that runs between October and July.

Rent a packraft: [www.backcountrybiking.co.uk/alpacka-raft-packraft-hire/](http://www.backcountrybiking.co.uk/alpacka-raft-packraft-hire/)

Take the ferry: [www.lochmullardochferry.co.uk/](http://www.lochmullardochferry.co.uk/)

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# A C R O S S

Bikepacking is having a bit of a moment.  
*Ray Wood* recently set out to try it for  
himself with a cross-Cambrian adventure



# O N T W O



# W A L K E R S

The sight of touring bikes with their often-colourful panniers has always struck a romantic chord with me. It's that notion of journeying, self-reliance and simple routine. But as a mountain biker and hillwalker, I'd always thought it would be even better if touring took you away from the tarmac and let you really get away from it all. Bikepacking, or off-road touring, lets you do just that.

This wheeled equivalent of a multi-day walk had been on my bucket list for quite some time, but the problem with lists is remembering to look at them. I'd even chosen a route for my first bikepacking trip: the Trans Cambrian Way. It's not so far from home but would give me the opportunity to explore parts of Wales I'd never visited before. It was just a matter of getting around to it: inertia is a terrible thing.

Over the last couple of years bikepacking has seen a surge in popularity, tied in to the availability of lightweight camping equipment and the development of bikepacking luggage by companies such as Alpkit and Wildcat – suitable for use even on a full-suspension mountain bike. Every mention of bikepacking on social media was a dig in the ribs that I needed to get myself organised. ➔

# W H E E L S



# Bikepacking



## 100 MILES ACROSS THE ELENYDD

The Trans Cambrian Way is around 100 miles long with 12,000 feet of ascent, starting in the market town of Knighton and finishing by the sea at Dovey Junction. Following bridleways and other rights of way linked by country lanes, it crosses the high and remote moorland of the Elenydd, the central portion of the sparsely populated Cambrian Mountains – once described as the “Green Desert of Wales”. The route isn’t widely known or promoted, and it’s not waymarked, apart from the very occasional yellow arrow, although in places it does follow a national trail: Glyndwr’s Way.

Having chosen to just take a bundle of A4 paper OS 1:50,000 map print-outs with the route marked, navigating was time-consuming and not always straight-forward. You can cover a lot of distance on a bike before you realise you’ve made a wrong turn. Using a GPS would be more convenient and easier, but the trip was also supposed to be a break from screens. The phone only came out once and that was just to confirm our position.

The Trans Cambria ride is normally done in three days, if you’re reasonably bike fit, stopping overnight in bed and breakfast accommodation. Camping obviously means carrying more weight but it gives you the freedom to choose, within reason, where to stop and adds to the experience in a good way.

Rachael, who enthusiastically signed up for the adventure, had never done any bikepacking before either. We decided to keep the pressure off and to opt for a ‘leisurely’ four-day itinerary. Parking the car by Knighton railway station we waited for the drizzle to stop. Although the station is in Shropshire, the town centre, a couple of hundred yards away, is in Wales. Surprisingly, the bikes didn’t feel too unwieldy as we pedalled off with fresh legs up the High Street. Travelling east to west means that, although the wind may be against you, there is less ascent this way round.

Arriving at Lloyney after a few kilometres of back lanes, we were surprised to discover that a small nondescript muddy path, cutting steeply up through the woods, was our route up into the hills. Pushing the bikes for a short distance, until the angle eased, we gained a long grassy ridge used in times gone by to connect Knighton and Newtown.

The route then meandered relatively easily and quickly through the heather past Beacon and Warren Hill. Even so, by



[top, left] At the start  
[top, right] Forging the  
Afon Claerddu on day  
two

[above] Inquisitive  
piglets with sharp  
teeth

[left] Caravan poorly  
disguised as a log cabin  
near Blaen Marchant

mid-afternoon the community shop in Llanbadarn Fynydd village was a welcome sight and the chance for a good rest. It was the best-stocked village shop I’d ever seen and it even served tea and coffee.

Avoiding the tricky ford over the River Ithon by a short detour we were soon back in open countryside surrounded by green hills. Rather than descend into Rhayader we camped on the hillside above Bwlch-y-Sarnau, leaving us with only a fast descent the next morning to pick-up some more supplies and eat a hearty Ty Morgans breakfast before heading up the Elan Valley.



End of day two high up  
above Ffair-Rhos: the joy  
of being self-reliant and  
choosing where to camp for  
the night



## AT TEIFI POOLS FOUR LAKES SPARKLED IN AN EXTRAORDINARY LANDSCAPE

### ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

From Elan Village, a steep uphill pedal and short push at one point to gain an undulating track, brought us with a couple of stream crossings, to the foot of the austere and imposing Claerwen Dam. Built to provide water for Birmingham it was completed in 1952. Following the reservoir's northern shoreline along a stony track for around 10 kilometres this 'inland sea' had a sombre feel about it, not helped by a leaden sky.

I wasn't sorry to leave it behind and reach the Teifi Pools: a group of four lakes at around 1500 feet that in stark contrast were delightful as they sparkled in an extraordinary landscape with obvious evidence of its glaciated past. Stopping for the night near an old farmhouse, marked as Blaen Marchant on the map, it clearly now only served the purpose as shelter for the shepherds when the sheep were being sheared or sorted.

The third day had a lethargy-inducing heat about it from the moment the sun rose above the inversion but it did include the most unusual puncture. Leaning my bike against a fence while opening a gate, a group of inquisitive piglets on the other side of the wire fencing rushed up to sniff the bike, perhaps hoping it was edible, and just to check one of them bit the rear tyre. Luckily the

tyre itself was undamaged but the inner tube didn't survive.

After riding past the grey and ochre spoil tips of Cwmystwyth lead mines, the cool of the Esgair Ychion Forest was appreciated. Arriving in Llangurig, reputed to be the highest village in Wales, we headed straight to the Bluebell Inn to slake our thirst. Situated on the A44 this was the first main road we'd seen since Knighton.

Creature comforts quickly eroded our resolve to carry on any further that day and we opted to stay the night at the Glangwy campsite just back down the road. A phone call was made to arrange a taxi to meet us the following day at the finish. To save putting the tent up and ensure a quick get-away we opted for Glangwy's 'Welcome Cabin', effectively a garden shed with a verandah, but it felt luxurious nonetheless. The friendly female farmer who owned the campsite explained how it was now the income from campers that kept the farm going.

In the morning a sinuous thread of singletrack, only a foot wide, led through the bracken alongside the Afon Bidno, out of the Wye Valley and into the Hafren Forest. The River Severn (Afon Hafren) rises on the slopes of Pumlumon, a few kilometres to the west.



# Bikepacking



The fun descent after Glaslyn on day four  
[right, top to bottom]  
Lunch below Moel Fadian;  
The end of the ride – or is it?



## BACK ON GLYNDWR'S WAY

From Staylitttle the route re-joins Glyndwr's Way, over exposed moorland that culminates in a steep but short, shaley descent above a ravine. Not the place to take a tumble. Reaching the lake of Glaslyn we were pleased with our progress, and since Aberdovey now seemed relatively close on the map I made the mistake of thinking we had time to spare as we cooked some soup and took in the impressive scenery below Foel Fadian.

The final descent was actually a long time coming as each downhill section seemed to be followed by yet another climb. The time to meet the taxi was set back for a second time when we missed a difficult to spot turning off a forest track.

Our self-congratulatory mood was tempered on arriving at Dovey Junction Station when we realised there was clearly going to be a problem meeting any taxi. The station didn't appear to have any vehicular access. The only way to reach this single island platform in the middle of the Dyfi Nature Reserve was along the kilometre long path we'd just ridden from the main road.

Phoning the taxi driver, yet again, solved the puzzle. There had been a misunderstanding and he was waiting at Aberdovey Station, 15 miles away along the coast. I admitted to a none-too-pleased Rachael that the mix-up may have been my fault and I might have said Aberdovey when I meant Dovey Junction. These things happen... don't they? With a mixture of relief and despair we agreed

to meet the taxi in Machynlleth so it was back on the bikes for a few more miles.

But it all ended well as the young taxi driver from Machs Taxis was totally understanding and friendly, he even took us to what he considered the best chip shop in Mach so we could grab some dinner. The £80 for getting both of us and our bikes back to the start in Knighton, an hour-and-a-half drive away, seemed a fair price for the great service and time-saving convenience.

Sitting in the mini-bus I felt that sense of disappointment you get when a great journey comes to an end. Although our last day was the longest in terms of distance, 55 kilometres, it hadn't felt as hard work as the earlier stages. Perhaps our bodies had begun to adjust to the demands of bikepacking. It seemed that on the route over four days we'd only encountered two walkers, a group of three off-road motorcyclists and one other mountain biker (out for a local ride in the Hafren Forest).

It had been a great journey where you felt immersed in the landscape. Travelling by bike left a greater impression of the rise and fall of the land than you perhaps get from walking, although there were definitely a couple of places I'd like to return to and explore on foot.

Next year, expanding my bikepacking experience could be the perfect excuse to go bothying in Scotland. ▲

## GET INTO BIKEPACKING

Bikepacking is essentially multi-day off-road bike touring. It gives you a greater range than being on foot but the same sense of freedom that you get from overnight camping or staying in a bothy. Within reason any bike capable of off-road biking is suitable for bikepacking: hard tail or a light full-suspension bike.

### The Trans Cambrian Way

Details of this route are on the IMBA site ([imba.org.uk/](http://imba.org.uk/)) with a ride guide although I don't recommend buying their maps. Better to mark the map on a Landranger OS map. There's a

good write-up with GPX tracks at [www.mbswindon.co.uk/mountain-biking-the-trans-cambrian-way/](http://www.mbswindon.co.uk/mountain-biking-the-trans-cambrian-way/)

### Gear

Dry bags attached to the bike by lightweight harness systems, that don't rely on the frame having eyelets as with racks and panniers, are commonly used for carrying gear. The space in the frame can also accommodate a frame bag and is a good place for heavier items. Panniers weigh more than specific bikepacking baggage and can make a bike unbalanced. In terms of

equipment to take, think in terms of lightweight camping and only taking what you'll need.

**Wildcat Gear** ([wildcatgear.co.uk/](http://wildcatgear.co.uk/)) hand-makes bikepacking kit in the UK. **Alpkit** sell a wide range of bikepacking equipment ([alpkit.com/bike-luggage](http://alpkit.com/bike-luggage)) and **Apidura** ([apidura.com](http://apidura.com)) is another company "leading the evolution in ultralight cycling".

### Further Reading:

[bikepacking.com/bikepacking-101](http://bikepacking.com/bikepacking-101)  
[bearbonesbikepacking.co.uk](http://bearbonesbikepacking.co.uk)  
[alpkit.com/spotlight/what-is-bikepacking](http://alpkit.com/spotlight/what-is-bikepacking)





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**Stafford Outdoor Leisure** Stafford 01785 240594

**Taunton Leisure** (Taunton/Exeter/Bristol) 01823 332987

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## Mountain Magic

Carey Davies

**THE PEAK DISTRICT.** A dark void in a circle of light. A Janus-faced land divided between dark gritstone and white limestone, between the wild wet moors and the lush green gorges, between the airy escarpments and the underground caves bigger than cathedrals. Where the people raised in the terraces of the towns trespassed for their – and our – right to feel freedom and belonging in nature. Where the rocks are stacked like pancakes, layered like folds of fat, as viscous in shape as flowing lava, as creased and crumpled as elephant skin, and have names like the Cakes of Bread, the Coach and Horses, the Salt Cellar and the Woolpacks. Next to all this, improbably draped over the hills, lies Britain's most vertiginous city – Sheffield. Eight years ago, I lived as a student in Sheffield. Next week I'll be packing the various objects I've accumulated in my life into boxes in my flat in Manchester and moving back there.

Normally I write about encounters with natural phenomena of some sort in this column, but this time I'm devoting it to a city. Despite the fact that only about 7% of Britain's landmass is 'urban', 80% of us live in cities. The connection between your home and the hills is probably conditioned by an urban environment, and where you live is the single biggest factor in determining the type and quality of experience you can have.

Despite making a living from things associated with the outdoors, in my working life I've been compelled for practical purposes to live in cities. Since leaving Sheffield I've inhabited four of them, in three nations, all with a different dynamic for experiencing the outdoors. Coastal Cardiff had the salt-sprayed cliffs of the Vale of Glamorgan and coal-line trains into the Valleys for a 'quick fix', and the wonderful Gower Peninsula and the Brecon Beacons within day-walk distance. Glasgow's gravity required a fairly lengthy drive to escape, but



Froggatt Edge, Peak District – on Sheffield's doorstep Photo: Carey Davies

with Loch Lomond and Arrochar in under an hour, Glen Coe in two, and all the hallowed hugeness of the Highlands beyond, no hillwalker could complain. London was, of course, an ambivalent sort of place to be, requiring a level of planning and commitment to get far enough north and west to be satisfied, but with the old oaks of Hampstead Heath as a sanity-saver I enjoyed my (short) time there. Before moving to Manchester I expected to spend most of my time on Bleaklow or Kinder Scout, but I've most enjoyed discovering the wonderful limestone country of the White Peak, and I will miss being able to reach both the Ogwen Valley and Langdale in two easy hours.

But the nearest I've come to having the countryside on my 'doorstep' was when I lived in Sheffield. If I'm honest, I wasn't too overtly outdoorsy back then – I was dimly aware of the down jacket brigade on campus but it wasn't my scene. I preferred to skulk off alone, which was incredibly easy to do from my digs in Crookes. All I had to do was walk up the top of the road and it was there outspread; the Rivelin

Valley winding away into the sunset, woods and pastures giving way to moors and freedom and the promise of endless unfettered walking.

A sort of faded, Fully Monty image still clings to Sheffield; an insular, dreary place of dead industry and vowels flatter than polished steel. The local authorities don't help matters by seeming anxious to disavow and destroy the city's industrial past instead of embracing and redefining it.

But in recent years it's true the city has started to emerge from the long shadow cast by the collapse of heavy industry to reveal its underappreciated green side. Half of Sheffield's population live within 15 minutes of open country. From my new place I'll be able to walk through an uninterrupted green corridor and be standing on Stanage Edge in three hours.

Living in Sheffield is possibly the nearest thing you can get to squaring the circle of being an outdoor-loving city-dweller. I can't wait to be back. 📍



Follow Carey on Twitter:  
@carey\_davies



# The Joys of Autumn Camping

It's been a wonderful autumn in Scotland, and Chris has been making the most of it

## Backpacking *Chris Townsend*



A starry camp in the Cairngorms Photo: Chris Townsend

**SITTING OUTSIDE THE TENT** one evening gazing at the brilliant night sky I realised just how much I relish the coming of autumn and winter, especially for the camping side of backpacking. Summer camps are not often ideal for enjoying the view. If it's calm the midges are likely to be biting. If it's stormy you want to be under cover. Sunset and sunrise are so close that to see both means only a few hours' sleep. And those are times when the midges are often at their worst too. Unless it's raining and the sun is hidden. Watching the stars doesn't feature in summer backpacking either. To see them you have to stay up late – and, yet again, cope with the midges – and even then the sky never seems fully dark. Generally in summer it's light when I fall asleep and light when I wake.

Come the first frosts and all this changes. The nights are lengthening, the midges are disappearing. Soon no sleep need be lost to see the sun set and the sun rise. Night skies are truly dark too, so the stars are bright when it's clear. Once past the equinox there's no need to be asleep in daylight. Indeed, it's best not to be as there's no longer seemingly endless time for walking, the one boon of summer. At this time of year I'm often up before dawn

and not making camp till dusk.

Camping is a different experience without the midges too. No need to cook in a steamy porch with a mosquito coil filling it with fumes and condensation running down the walls because outside the midges are battering themselves against the flysheet. No need to lie sweating in a zipped up double-skin tent on warm humid nights. In autumn and winter I only close the outer door when the weather is stormy. The inner tent door stays open unless spindrift is blowing in. In fact I often don't have an inner door as I use just a flysheet or tarp and a groundsheet, enjoying the freedom this brings. I feel more in touch with the world than in summer through not having to seal myself inside.

The choice of campsites expands as the biting insects move on. In summer I avoid camping in forests or sheltered spots and seek out places that are breezy (but always aware that if the wind drops the midges will reappear instantly). Now I can venture deep into the trees and know I can sit outside the tent watching them as they become silhouettes as night falls.

Summer is usually seen as the season for camping because it's the warmest time

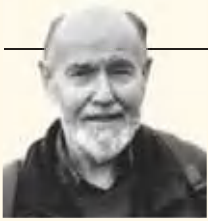
of year. But for me, the autumn is the start of a long period of potential. Yes, it is colder, sometimes much colder, but the right clothing and sleeping equipment deals with this. I prefer anyway to feel slightly chilly than too hot. The crisp touch of cold air on the face is enlivening. Waking to see a frosty world is stimulating and exciting too. I love watching the first rays of the sun touch the summits and then slowly move down towards my camp. The landscape glows and warms as the sun sweeps over it, coming to life and sparkling in the brightness.

The colours of nature become more varied and interesting in autumn. Late summer they are uniform, a mass of green and brown. Once the leaves and grasses start to turn yellow and orange, the woods and hills are brighter and more distinctive. On frosty days the sky is a deeper blue, without the haze often found in summer. Then as autumn turns to winter and the colours fade, the snow falls, changing the landscape again and creating a monochrome world that is just as beautiful. 🍂



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# So Much Hot Air

Roger questions the value of the biennial Earth Summit

## Environment

*Roger Smith*

AT THE END OF NOVEMBER, the latest in a long line of 'Earth Summits' is due to open in Paris. This one, called COP21 for short, is set to last a fortnight and bring together delegates from more than 150 countries. But will it achieve anything?

I have a deeply cynical view of these gatherings. Over the years, from Rio to Kyoto to Johannesburg, they have produced a whole series of Accords, Agreements and Protocols which have had very little genuine effect on even slowing down climate change, let alone reversing it. There is a great irony in the fact that taken together, the hundreds of delegates plus support teams, translators, journalists, environmental campaigners, and dignitaries (who jet in for a day, produce their own contribution to the mountain of rhetoric and jet off again) have a pretty substantial carbon footprint.

The main value of these occasions is probably the networking and sharing of information, particularly among smaller nations. Successful local initiatives can be demonstrated, passed on and put to use elsewhere.

In advance of COP21, scientists warned that at the present rate of progress, there is no way the climate change juggernaut will

be checked to keep the global temperature rise to below 2°C. This appears to be a critical figure. Below this, change is gradual and to an extent at least can be managed, though there will still be serious consequences. Once it gets above 2°C it can start to accelerate, leading to rapid icecap melt, many more violent weather episodes and disastrous outcomes for coastal and island communities as sea levels rise.

At present, even if every government pledge across the world is implemented, the estimate is a rise of 2.7°C by 2100. This is based on the current carbon emissions figure of about 50bn tonnes a year, continuing at that rate or perhaps edging up towards 60bn by 2030. To check the rise we need to get that figure down below 35bn tonnes – a reduction of about 30% on the current figure but more like 40% on the predicted 2030 figure.

That's a huge ask. If we don't make this reduction we will see serious effects in many areas such as food production, fishing and precious natural habitats such as coral reefs. You may think it would be quite nice to shift the UK climate up a couple of degrees, but this would mean losing many rare arctic-alpine plant species and also many species

of birds that grace our uplands and add so much to our walking enjoyment. A warmer climate already seems to be encouraging the spread of ticks, which no-one would want.

Lord Stern, a 'climate economist', said recently that "It is essential that a legal agreement is agreed at COP21 in order to create a process through which countries will review their efforts and find ways to ramp up their actions on reducing emissions". The same call has been made before most of the previous Earth Summits and of course it didn't happen. Countries go there with their own national agenda. Are they going to concede this to the greater global good? Not likely. This applies especially to the larger industrialised nations. They may sign documents in which they agree to "work towards" reducing emissions but they won't set binding figures with a firm target date.

There is also a huge problem over finance. Emission reduction schemes, especially on a large scale, are expensive and to achieve global reductions the major developed nations will have to fund the less wealthy nations to the tune of hundreds of billions of dollars. This again appears to be an unlikely scenario.

None of this means we should stop doing everything we possibly can in the UK to reduce our own emissions. Indeed, it is vital that we do so both as a contribution to global reduction and as an example to other countries. How we achieve reductions is of course a whole debate in itself, opening a series of cans full of worms labelled wind power, fracking and so on. This scenario is repeated in many other countries, so you can begin to see the wider problem. If we can't reach agreement on how to achieve our own reductions, how can we tell others what to do?

You can expect to see world leaders in Paris on 10 and 11 December signing pieces of paper headed 'Paris Accord 2015' – or something similar – which look and sound impressive but are actually carefully worded so that they fall short of that binding agreement that not just Lord Stern but all of us are looking for. You have to question the value of these grandiose junkets. Have they really achieved anything that could not have been done in smaller, direct meetings? I don't think so, and it's time to stop the party and get on with the real work of saving the planet. 📌

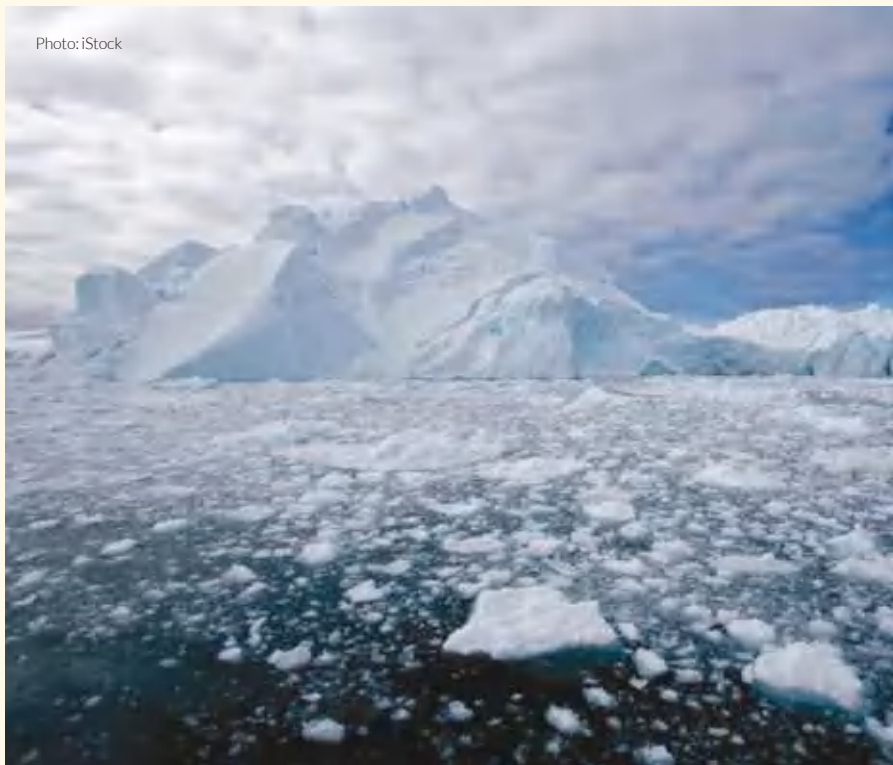


Photo: iStock



# *A Philosophy of Walking*

Frederic Gros



Jim is thrilled by the intellectual light this little book shines on 'pedestrianism'

Hillwalkers' Library  
Jim Perrin

“...those brief ecstatic instants when the body, while walking, advances without being aware of itself, almost like a tumbling dead leaf.”

THE QUOTATION ABOVE. Not an analogy that's ever particularly struck you? Nor me either – not even when I was walking autumnal woodland paths this afternoon with it freshly in mind. But then, the author's a French philosopher, a professor, an authority on the work of Michel Foucault. So you might expect a degree of the abstruse. You'll be disappointed if you do, for this month's title is both lyrically evocative of the walker's physical and mental states of being and thrillingly insightful about what we might call the literature of pedestrianism.

It first appeared under the title *Marcher, Une Philosophie* in 2009, and only came out in John Howe's excellent translation, which captures the lucidity, the unstrained epigrammatic brilliance of the French original, last year. So, what we're looking at is *A Philosophy of Walking* by Frederic Gros – a little miracle of a book first reviewed in *The Great Outdoors* by Will Renwick earlier this year. To some extent this may be, in Edward Thomas's terse phrase, one of those “books written about books written about other people's books”. It may saunter or stray through the territory of “MacNature Writing”. But how much better Professor Gros does it than any of his innumerable English counterparts!

There are chapters here (interspersed with others under more general headings: “Slowness”, “Eternities”, “States of

Well-Being”, “Elemental” etc.) devoted to analyses of the influence of walking on the work of Nietzsche, Rimbaud, Rousseau, Thoreau, Gerard de Nerval, Immanuel Kant and Mahatma Gandhi. Each is handled with exceptional intelligence and aplomb, the essence of work, authorial character, and the interplay between the two bodied forth in a relaxed, accessible manner typical of how French culture generally treats intellectual matter and enquiry. As here, on Nietzsche:

*“...for thinking, one needs a detached outlook, to be at a distance, to have clear air. One needs to be unconstrained to think far. And what then do details, definitions, exactitudes mean? It is the armature of human destiny that one needs to see laid out. From very high up one sees the movements of landscapes, the design of hills. And thus with history: Antiquity, Christianity, modernity... what do they produce in the way of archetypes, characters, essences? The moment your nose is buried in dates, in facts, everything falls back on your own clenched peculiarity. Whereas the need is to construct fictions, myths, general destinies.”*

There's a scintillating acuity and insight there, not just into the basis of Nietzsche's thought in works like *On the Genealogy of Morals*, but more generally and for us as hill-goers rather more usefully into that intellectual remove and liberation that outdoor environments and activity among

them can bring. Descending recently towards evening from the western end of the Malvern Hills this passage's exact pattern and essence of thought absorbed my mind. To come to this book and find it so succinctly and resonantly expressed was an epiphanic moment of mental clarity. I suspect most readers will take from it similar gifts. It's one of the most rewarding and invigorating texts I've encountered in years.

In this next quotation, we keep company with Gandhi, towards the end of his great life: after independence, after partition, just before his assassination:

*“...an old man of nearly seventy-seven, walking all day leaning on the shoulder of his young niece, holding his pilgrim's staff in the other hand, going on foot from village to village, from massacre to massacre, supported by his faith alone, dressed like the poorest of the poor, underlining everywhere the reality of love and the absurdity of hatreds, and opposing the world's violence with the infinite peace of a slow, humble, unending walk.”*

Part of this book's extraordinary accomplishment is that it gives our community of outdoor interest over into such company, draws the parallels, makes us as if of one world, and that a kinder, more natural and better one. Who would have thought ever to read such a simply and marvellously accomplished metaphysics for the hillwalker? 📖



# New Book Reviews



## *A William Condry Reader*

Jim Perrin

Gomer Press, £14.99

THERE COMES A TIME for most writers – often a generation or so after their death – when they are in danger of being forgotten. Bill Condry (as he was always known) died in 1998, so that time would be approaching for him, and the publication of this collection of his essays, gathered together by TGO's own Jim Perrin, is welcome. Condry was a good enough writer for his work to be available today.

It is appropriate that Jim has produced this book. It can be seen as a tribute and a nod to one of his peers. Both men have lived most of their lives in Wales and both

are country-lovers with the observant eye of the naturalist and mountaineer respectively. Jim Perrin provides a lengthy, thoughtful and insightful introduction to the book, enabling those who are perhaps unfamiliar with Condry's work to gain an appreciation of his qualities before reading the words of the man himself.

The essays are then divided into seven sections (six really – the final Envoi is just one page) – and cover the full range of the naturalist's work and views on not just his world but the wider environmental scene. Indeed, if you only read one essay from this book, make it the final one. Entitled 'Birth of a Bird Reserve', it describes Bill Condry's stewardship of Ynys-hir for the RSPB. Anyone who was fortunate enough to visit Ynys-hir during Bill's time as Warden could not fail to be enriched.

But the essay has much more than that. In its final pages it provides a prescient and undeniable plea for the positive power of nature conservation in our society, and its words will strike a resonant echo with most TGO readers. "We cannot go on over-exploiting our finite resources for ever" he says, and wonders, a little despairingly, "what hope is there of saving anything of ultimate value to the spirit of man in terms of natural beauty and wildness; or of health and sanity in the real meaning of these words?"

These are profound thoughts, and they make it essential that writers such as Bill Condry are not lost to us. This book is invaluable in that respect. There are two omissions – no photographs (perhaps Jim felt the words were enough) and no index. But then it is a book to dip into where you please, not to read from first page through to last. Wherever you turn, you will find wise words, keen insights into nature, and an inspiration to go out and find that "natural beauty and wildness" that we all surely need. 📖

Roger Smith

**Anyone who was fortunate enough to visit Ynys-hir during Bill's time as Warden could not fail to be enriched**

## *Walking on the Gower*

Andrew Davies

Cicerone, £12.95



This pocket guide focuses on the quieter side of Gower, visiting the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty's

archaeological sites and places of general beauty and isolation. There are 30 walks in total, each one with a route description and OS map extracts, and they range from four to 22km in length. Another new release from Cicerone is the guide to *Walking in Carmarthenshire* by Jim Rubery.

## *Photographing North Wales*

Simon Kitchin

fotoVue, £23.95



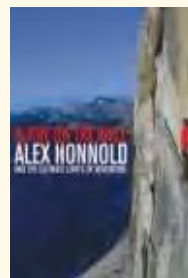
From the front cover to the very last page, this is a book that's particularly easy on the eye. Kitchin has mapped

out his favourite areas in North Wales to photograph, revealing his favourite viewpoints and explaining how to reach them. There are some useful technical tips included as well.

## *Alone on the Wall*

Alex Honnold

Pan Macmillan, £16.99



A memoir from one of the world's finest 'free solo' climbers. Honnold recounts seven of his biggest, seemingly

impossible climbs, including his El Capitan speed record and his ascent of the notorious Moonlight Buttress in Utah.

# Readers' page

Share your views, your experiences and your favourite photos  
[editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk](mailto:editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk)

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Please include a phone number and postal address.  
Letters may be edited for clarity or to fit the space available.



## Walkers and mountain bikers

I read with interest your article 'Two Wheels or Two Feet?' (TGO, November) which stated that cyclists should give way, by law, to pedestrians and equine users (this falls within the Countryside Act 1968). However, it then goes on to say that it can be difficult to "implement in practice." I can only suggest that cyclists try to follow that rule as best they can.

While a walker may be considerate and possibly give way more easily, confronting a horse is a completely different experience. If cyclists come rushing up or down a bridleway unexpectedly then it is both foolish and reckless to expect any horse rider to move over or to give way quickly. Therefore in this circumstance the law is clear – you should give way!

There are many bridleways or routes with higher rights where there may be a potential clash of use so it's always a good tip to shout (politely) well ahead or to give a bell in advance.

In terms of the opening up of the footpath network completely to other users such as cyclists as a right: a *carte blanche* approach to this might not be so easy to achieve as it would not only raise unrealistic expectations in terms of providing adequate furniture and surfacing but also has huge implications for Public Rights of Way (PRoW) administrators when central, regional and local governments are drastically reducing their funding. Surely it is far better to manage the existing network while having easier legal mechanisms to upgrade sections based on their individual merits. This would also require corresponding reductions in both the legal and administrative costs which are often the reasons why landowners and officers are reluctant to bring useful changes to the table.

**Peter Rutherford**

Access Officer

Snowdonia National Park Authority

## A treasure trove of island peaks

I have just read with interest Craig Weldon's excellent article on the Faroe Islands in the October edition of TGO. On p37 of the article, Craig "wondered if anybody had made a list of the Marilyn-height hills in the Faroes."

Craig and your readers might be interested to know there is indeed such a list, compiled by Andy Tomkins. A print-booklet and e-booklet version of the list can be downloaded for free via a link on the bottom of the Faroes page on my Europeaklist website at [sites.google.com/site/europeaklist/Home/denmark/faeroe-islands](http://sites.google.com/site/europeaklist/Home/denmark/faeroe-islands).

There are many other hill and mountain lists on this website for other countries in Europe, and more will follow soon.

**Mark Trengove**

Europeaklist Editor



## Lightweight on the Cape Wrath

I enjoyed Alex Roddie's description of his Cape Wrath Trail Walk in the October 2015 edition, a walk I have also done. However I thought that John Dodwell's letter in the November edition struck a slightly jarring note.

John makes the point that Alex "wore trainers and used a 'tent' which would have been more at home on a British beach in summer." He goes on to suggest that Alex should have reflected on whether he was foolhardy to attempt the route thus equipped and that if you are not able to carry the weight of suitable kit you are not fit enough.

To be fair to John, Alex is being a bit flippant when he describes his tent and footwear. I looked up his blog and his tent is a Tarptent Notch weighing 770g and costing \$285 which looks up to the job. On his feet Alex was wearing Inov8 Rocclites, a highly respected fell running shoe and one which many hillwalkers and backpackers have turned to. Our own Chris Townsend writes of wearing such shoes and indeed, horror of horrors, trail sandals.

Lightweight enthusiasts enjoy the freedom of having lighter loads but if others wish to carry heavier loads, that's their choice and each to their own. Some people's opinion may be that heavier loads are dangerous because they are more tiring and cause you to go slower, giving potential for accidents later in the day or benightment.

I do agree with John that inexperienced people could be drawn into situations which they are ill equipped to deal with in terms of kit and experience. This needs a fine balance from the magazine, not only to encourage people but to make sure they do things in a progressive way, learning as they go.

We all love the outdoors but we all use it slightly differently.

**Matt Gemmell**

## Social Media



Make sure to keep us updated with what you've been up to in the hills. You can share your shots with us on our Facebook page and on Twitter using @TGOmagazine. We're also on Instagram – tag your shots with #TGO #TheGreatOutdoors and we'll share them!







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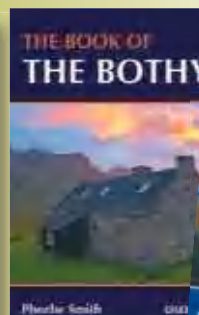
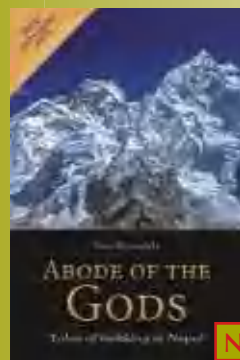
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# HILL SKILLS

- Managing the risks
- Questions to ask
- Emergency kit
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- Building up experience
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## Safe days in the hills

The  
Great  
Outdoors  
GUIDE



# Learning to manage the risks

**Kevin Rutherford** from the national outdoor training centre Glenmore Lodge recommends you ask yourself a few questions before heading out

It's the summer and you're escaping into the hills for a day, planning to tick off a couple of remote Munros in north-west Scotland. The weather is playing ball and, after a brief stop for some lunch on the first summit, you start to descend to a col on rough loose rocky ground... when your friend slips on loose rock and falls heavily. On most occasions such as these, we dust ourselves down and get on with it, although there are of course situations where a small slip or trip can result in something more serious. But run through the same situation in winter, when the slope you are descending is ice snow and névé... the outcome could be very different.

It can be difficult to pinpoint the reasons why specific accidents happen – it could be something as simple as the small slip defined above, but sometimes numerous reasons come together in a domino effect. And one of the underlying reasons for that is the human factor – it's us! In order to manage the risks inherent in a day out in the hills, you need to make sure you ask yourself (and answer) the right questions about your route, your fitness and your skills before you have even set foot on the hills.



Steep rock can get dangerous in wet weather  
Photo: Glenmore Lodge

## THE QUESTIONS WE ALL SHOULD ASK OURSELVES

### About your fitness

1. When was the last time I was on the hill and how ambitious was that route?
2. Have I been keeping myself active?
3. Is the plan for the day it achievable with my current fitness level?
4. How far am I walking and how much altitude will I gain?

### About the route

5. What speed will I be walking at?
6. What time will it get dark?
7. Will I be walking with the weather or fighting against it?
8. Have I identified

possible areas to escape or shorten the route?

9. Can I compare this day with my previous days out or will this be my most challenging day yet?
10. Have I left details of the route plan with the relevant people?
11. What happens if I don't turn up at the end of the day or I'm very late?

### About your skills and knowledge

12. Do I have all the relevant skills to pull out on the hill, depending on the type of ground I am on, weather and conditions underfoot?

13. Do I have some basic map and compass skills to get the correct **Direction** (setting the map), **Distance** (interpreting the scale, measuring distance), **Detail** (from A to B what will happen to the ground or what will I see?) and what is my **Destination** (what will it look like on the ground)?
14. Can I pace 100m and walk on a straight line bearing in poor visibility and in winter conditions?
15. Will I know when to decide I'm out of my comfort zone and need to change my plans or reverse my route?

You also need to be able to interpret the weather and avalanche forecasts (see page 66) and to pack appropriately for the conditions (see facing page).



## STEEP GROUND

**Kevin Rutherford** offers advice on how to deal with challengingly vertiginous terrain underfoot

Any steep ground on your route can easily be identified at the planning stage by looking at the map. Outcrops and crags are obvious features on the map that as walkers you will generally try to avoid, possibly along with scree slopes and boulder fields. But if you end up on unexpectedly steep terrain, don't try to take shortcuts through it; get your map out and try to work out where you've been, the direction you have been walking in and where you could now be. The safest option is to reverse off the steep ground until your last known point and hopefully then you'll be back on route.

Be aware of places on the map where contour lines are squashed together, an obvious sign that the ground is steeper, or where the contours between the index contours vanish. Remember that there are usually four contour lines between the darker index lines; if there's not, then you're on or looking at going onto ground that is at an angle of 25 degrees or more. Hidden within this ground may also be small outcrops of up to 5m that aren't quite big enough or multiple enough to be marked as outcrops on your map. Using the magnifying glass part of your compass can help identifying these areas.



## Techniques for coping with steep ground

1

### STEEP, WET GRASSY OR HEATHERY SLOPES

"Standing tall" and edging your boot becomes a must (standing tall also works well on rocky slabs). Leaning into the slope changes the position of your core; ideally you want the heavy core directly above your feet, pushing down into your boots.

2

### SHORT, ROCKY STEPS

Sound rock climbing movement is required. Keep three points of contact on the rock and really concentrate on your footwork rather than looking for handholds (handholds are for balance). If a step is around head height, be prepared to use team work and 'spot' each other, using a braced stance with knees bent and hands up ready to support the weight of the other person.

3

### DESCENDING

It's always easier to go up than down but don't go up if you think you can't reverse it, especially if you are not 100% certain of your route choice. If you are descending, a defensive position will always feel safest, fighting gravity rather than going with it. Reversing the previous techniques will help: turn in and face the rock or step; stick your bum out and then you can see where you need to put your feet, using your hands again for balance.

If short, exposed rock climbing moves aren't your cup of tea, there may be an alternative route: look out for small paths underneath or around the step that you might be able to follow safely. And remember that snow or ice on this steeper terrain will turn your day from summer walking straight into winter climbing: a huge jump in skills and experience. If in doubt, sign up for a course.

Kit to keep you safe

Obviously we all hope we won't find ourselves out of our depth or in treacherous conditions, but it could happen to anyone. Always carry safety equipment in your pack, even though you hope you'll never use it.

### Emergency Shelter

Either a single-person bivi bag or a group shelter  
*Pictured: Lomo Emergency Shelter (£19.50)*

### Whistle

The international distress signal is a series of six blasts, repeated after a minute's interval.

*Pictured: Lifesystems Emergency Whistle (£5.25)*

### Headtorch

Crucial for navigation in the dark; can also be used as an emergency signal (six short flashes followed by a minute's break before repeating).

Lifesystems also now produce a new product called the emergency strobe (£36.99), which is visible up to a mile's radius.

*Pictured: Alpkit Viper (£12.50)*

### First aid kit

Ideally in a tough pouch with equipment for tackling wounds, sprains, blisters and pain relief.

*Pictured: Lifesystems Trek First Aid Kit (£13.50)*

### Spare hat and gloves

Carry several pairs of gloves in winter

*Pictured: Extremities Storm Glove GTX (£40)*

*Pictured: Lowe Alpine Classic Mountain Cap (£30)*

### PLUS

- Map, waterproof case and compass
- Quality footwear and waterproofs
- Ice axe and crampons in winter
- Fully charged mobile phone
- GPS or mapping on a smartphone to help with relocation
- Sufficient food plus emergency food
- A warm drink in cold weather





# Accident blackspots

**Heather Morning**, Mountain Safety Advisor with The Mountaineering Council of Scotland, takes a look at five mountain locations in the Scottish Highlands that are the scenes of frequent accidents, and offers advice on how you can avoid falling victim to them

A look through Scottish Mountain Rescue statistics reveals the most common accident 'blackspots'. The tourist track on Ben Nevis is top of the league table for Mountain Rescue call-outs to one specific location in Scotland. Other challengers are the Aonach Eagach and Coire na Tulaich on Buachaille Etive Mor in Glen Coe, the Cuillin of Skye and the Goat Track in Coire an t-Sneachda in the Cairngorms. Blackspots are marked on the maps to the right, with recommended alternative routes marked in red. These are provided as guidelines only.

Photo: Glenmorre Lodge



## Terrain traps

A terrain trap is a geographical feature where avalanched snow will accumulate because it has nowhere else to run. It may be a depression or flattening in the hillside, such as a gully, corrie basin or even an abrupt change in slope angle which would allow avalanche debris to accumulate rather than carry on down the mountainside.

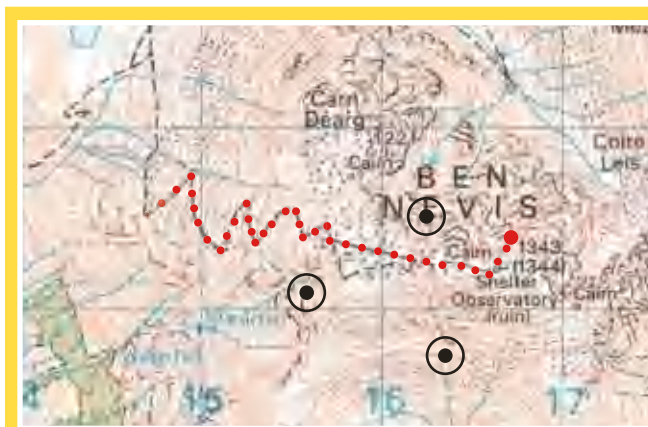
## Ben Nevis Tourist Track

**Start of track at GR: NN125728**

Due to the Ben's iconic status as the highest mountain in the UK, it attracts huge numbers of people. Recent figures from the John Muir Trust electronic people-counters on the tourist track reveal that a staggering 20,000 people a month ascend Ben Nevis via this route alone during the busy summer months. By the law of averages, the more people there are, the more accidents there will be.

For your average hillwalker, the tourist track is a straightforward constructed footpath with very little objective danger. Problems come from users' poor fitness levels, predisposed medical conditions, inadequate clothing and equipment, lack of navigation skills or poor general 'hill sense'.

Common navigation errors occur in various locations. The map below highlights where people often end up. Cairns are now in place to mark the correct descent route from the summit on the tourist track (a grid bearing of 231° for 150m from the summit, then a grid bearing of 282°) but in deep snow or a white-out they won't always be seen, so make sure you can navigate without them. See [mcofs.org.uk/ben-nevis-navigation.asp](http://mcofs.org.uk/ben-nevis-navigation.asp) for detailed information.



231° for 150m [from summit] then 282°

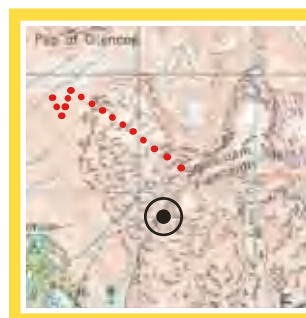
## Aonach Eagach, Glen Coe

**Start descent at GR: NN133581**

'Notched Ridge' is the Gaelic translation of this infamous ridge, which gives us a clue as to why the Aonach Eagach is up there on the 'leaderboard' of blackspots. It is often claimed to be the most difficult ridge traverse on the mainland. Certainly to link the two Munros of Meall Dearg and Sgorr nam Fiannaich requires a good head for heights across exposed horizontal sections, combined with some steep scrambling both in ascent and descent.

Accidents do happen on the ridge traverse itself, but it's the descent that catches people out. The ridge is normally tackled from east to west and descent off the western end by any route is steep and loose. Most accidents have

occurred while descending the traditional route directly down the side of the Clachaig Gully. Even those with the best of knees will find this 825m of descent direct to the Clachaig Inn gruelling. With many loose rocky steps underpinned with consequential drops below. A far more user-friendly alternative is to descend north off the final summit and pick up the track which descends west from the Pap.







## Coire na Tulaich, Buachaille Etive Mor GR: NN217545

Look in any Munro guide and the suggested route will take you directly up through Coire na Tulaich en-route to the popular Munro of Sgurr Dearg on Buachaille Etive Mor. The path is now constructed virtually all the way up to the head of the corrie. However, in winter this corrie accumulates a huge amount of snow, stripped from the high ground to the south with the prevailing south-westerly winds.

There have been several incidents of multiple fatalities as a result of deep burials in this serious 'terrain trap' (see

box-out, bottom of p64). This route MUST be avoided during periods of high avalanche risk. Check out the Scottish Avalanche Information Service website prior to your visit ([www.sais.gov.uk](http://www.sais.gov.uk)) and consider your options. Your option may be to leave this one for another day or choose an alternative route to minimise the risk. An alternative route is shown on the map following the line of a ridge to the west of the coire.

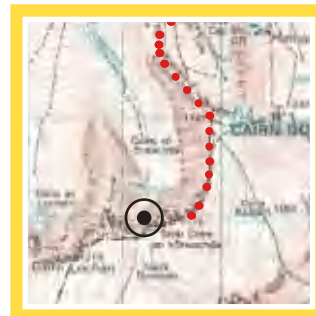
## The Goat Track, Coire an t-Sneachda, Cairngorms GR: NH991029

In summer, this 'track' is steep, loose and badly eroded and provides one of only a few options for exiting Coire an t-Sneachda to access the Cairngorm Plateau. A well-established, constructed track takes you from the Coire Cas car park at 635m into the boulder field in the base of Coire an t-Sneachda then the terrain dramatically changes. This ease of access is almost certainly the reason why a high

number of incidents occur here.

In winter, Coire an t-Sneachda is arguably the most accessible and therefore popular venue for winter mountaineers. The 'Goat Track' is a popular descent route back into the coire for climbers having completed routes. It faces north and in winter, accumulates snow stripped from the plateau with the prevailing south-westerly winds. Knowledge of avalanche conditions is vital in addition to the use of axe and crampons to negotiate this access route safely.

For both summer and winter, alternatives are available – see map below.



## The Cuillin of Skye

The Cuillin are unique. Complex route-finding, challenging navigation (particularly due to the unreliability of compasses on gabbro, which has magnetic properties) and the technical nature of even some of the easiest Munro-bagging lines means that all should treat these mountains with caution and respect. Unless you have a great head for heights, scrambling experience and rope-work

skills, then leave it to the experts to guide you safely. Check out the following page for details and advice on hiring an expert : [www.mcofs.org.uk/guidance-professional-mountaineering-services.asp](http://www.mcofs.org.uk/guidance-professional-mountaineering-services.asp). I would highly recommend the Harveys map 'Skye: the Cuillin' at 1:25,000 scale. On the reverse is an enlargement of the main Cuillin ridge at 1:12,500 scale. It is also useful to back-up your map and compass with a GPS.

# BUILDING UP EXPERIENCE

Going on a course can provide valuable training, particularly if you want to increase your skills quickly, says **Kevin Rutherford**. But nothing beats time on the hill

Your mountain experience is ideally gained in short small steps – on your own, with friends or as part of a club. Jumping straight into the winter environment, missing out on summer hillwalking, could have dire consequences but could be bridged by attending training courses.

Although you can quickly gain lots of skills on a course, you still need the experience and judgement of when to use them rather than being

told when to do so. Having the base line summer experience will help with your decision-making and "hill sense".

**Glenmore Lodge mountaineering department offers courses in scrambling, climbing, mountaineering, walking and navigation.**

**For further information visit [www.glenmorelodge.org.uk](http://www.glenmorelodge.org.uk) or call 01479 861 256.**

## Heuristic traps

*As we discussed in last month's TGO, people often rely on simple rules of thumb, or heuristics, when faced with daunting situations. These decision-making shortcuts can be dangerous. The following are the six types of heuristic trap that it's all too easy to fall into.*

1

### Familiarity

Just because it was ok last time, doesn't mean it will be this time.

2

### Acceptance

Don't just accept what somebody else – or even the rest of the group – says.

3

### Commitment

You may have planned a particular route but you're not committed to it. Be prepared to change your plans.

4

### Expert Halo

Everyone should engage in decision-making – don't rely on the 'expert'.

5

### Scarcity

There will always be another opportunity.

6

### Social Proof

People often try to conform to what they perceive to be 'normal' in a difficult situation. Make your own decisions, don't worry how you appear to others.

# Weather forecasts

These are called “forecasts” for a reason – they can never guarantee accuracy. Kevin Rutherford of Glenmore Lodge recommends that reading more than one forecast will help paint a more accurate picture of what it may be like at 900m. Look for one that’s specific to the area you’re visiting. The Mountain Weather Information Service is excellent and the Met Office also now publishes specific mountain weather forecasts. Check out [lakedistrictweatherline.co.uk](http://lakedistrictweatherline.co.uk) for the Lakes. Here are Kevin’s tips for interpreting the forecasts and their impact on your safety:

- How windy will it be? Constant 35mph plus and you are in for a hard day!
- How wet? In heavy rain, waterproofs will last for two to three hours before becoming saturated and that’s not including sweat!
- How cold? A mix of all three could be your worst case scenario!
- Where might the cloud base be? If it’s a low cloud base, do you have the appropriate skills to navigate over the tops?
- Does the forecast tie in with what you are seeing on the hill?



## AVALANCHES

If you are heading into snowy hills, particularly in Scotland, it’s vital to understand avalanche safety. Here is **Kevin Rutherford’s** guide to the stages you should go through in planning a trip into terrain that might be avalanche-prone:

1. Make sure you understand how to interpret the forecast on the Scottish Avalanche Information Service (SAIS) website, including the ‘avalanche wind rose’, the colour coding and, just as importantly, the text.
2. Check that you can identify the key slope aspects and snow types on the hill that are referred to in the text.
3. Look at the Scottish Avalanche Information Service blog pages for recent photographs and information on the area you’re hoping to visit.
4. Highlight the possible avalanche hotspot areas on your route.
5. Make sure you can navigate around the hotspot safely if necessary.
6. Check through the weather forecasts for the past five days. How much snow has been falling? What direction has it been blown in?
7. Consider whether there is now enough wind, at 15mph or more, to redistribute the fresh snow. Where might it be redistributed to?
8. Does your route ascend or descend any slopes of 25° or more and what direction do they face? Does this mirror the areas of risk on the avalanche wind rose?
9. Decide whether it would be wise to change your route.

Launched last year, the *Be Avalanche Aware!* leaflet has very good information for anyone planning to walk in the winter. It is available printed on waterproof paper or can be downloaded from the Scottish Avalanche Information Service website at [www.beaware.sais.gov.uk](http://www.beaware.sais.gov.uk). Also check out this free download from our website, taken from a series of articles published in the winter of 2013-2014: [tgomagazine.co.uk/global/pdfs/Avalanche-Safety.pdf](http://tgomagazine.co.uk/global/pdfs/Avalanche-Safety.pdf).



Photo: Carey Davies



## WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue Team Leader *Iain Nixon* has worked with specialist outdoor retailer Above & Beyond to put together this advice on what to do if you run into trouble in the hills

### Winter safety lectures

1

Preparation is key to avoiding trouble in the hills. Plan your route, check weather forecasts, and pack kit and provisions accordingly. Include a first-aid kit and other emergency items no matter how short the outing. Remember to always let someone know where you are going and when you'll be back.

2

If you do find yourself in trouble, stay calm and don't do anything rash. Groups should identify someone to take charge and manage the situation. Then, determine whether or not you can get yourselves down safely or need help.

3

If someone in your group is injured, make sure you and everyone else with you is safe before dealing with the injured member. Some basic first aid training will really help in this situation.

4

Your biggest threat will be the elements, so make sure you keep warm. Layer up and get out of the wind and rain. Make sure you have an emergency 'bivi' shelter big enough for the whole group, or take two smaller ones.

5

Make sure you can be seen: a brightly coloured bivi

shelter is great for this. Find somewhere that shelters you from the elements – but also allows you to remain visible. The Search and Rescue team need to be able to spot you.

6

If you need help, prepare by writing down the following information: your name, your contact number and any others in the group, the number in your party and their ages, and relevant details for a **CHALET** report.

7

Dial 999 or 112. Ask for the Police and then request "Mountain Rescue." Both numbers connect to emergency services, and neither has priority. The team also recommend signing up to the 999 Text Service by texting the word "register" via SMS to 999. Do it now.

8

During the call, provide the Police with all of the information you have written down including the **CHALET** report.

**C Casualties** – give details of you and your party including any injuries.

**H Hazards** – give details of any hazards and the prevailing conditions (wind strength, visibility, temperature).

**A Access** – give details of ground conditions and terrain, the route you took

and any distinguishing features.

**L Location** – give a description of your location and six figure grid reference with the two letter code is ideal. If you are using a GPS device then a ten figure grid reference is even better.

**E Equipment** – give details of what you have with you.

**T Type of incident** – give a brief description of the time and apparent cause of the incident.

9

Having made the call to request Mountain Rescue, stay in the same location, unless it is not safe to do so, until help arrives. Try to ensure you retain a mobile signal as Mountain Rescue may wish to speak to you.

10

The alternative to relying on a mobile signal is something like a SPOT tracker, which has the ability to send an emergency message. Remember: you can't rely on phoning for help. If you're in a group and can't get a signal, you may have to split the party; some staying with the casualty, some going for help.

*Above & Beyond supports the Northumberland National Park Mountain Rescue Team with the provision of mapping and equipment for the team, and by sharing safety information with the public. Check out their range of outdoor equipment at [aboveandbeyond.co.uk](http://aboveandbeyond.co.uk).*

*Both the BMC and the MCofS are running winter safety lectures soon.*

#### ENGLAND AND WALES:

The BMC's speakers are IFMGA British Mountain Guides Neil Johnson and James Thacker. Tickets can be purchased from the BMC shop at [www.bmcshop.co.uk](http://www.bmcshop.co.uk) or by calling Becky McGovern on 0161 438 3302.

**Tuesday 17 November, 7.30pm**

University of Liverpool

**Wednesday 18 November, 7.30pm**

University of Leeds

**Thursday 19 November, 7.30pm**

University of Cumbria, Ambleside

**Tuesday 24 November, 7.30pm**

University of Leicester

**Wednesday 25 November, 7.30pm**

University College London

**Thursday 26 November, 7.30pm**

Cardiff University

#### SCOTLAND:

Heather Morning, Mountain Safety Advisor at the MCofS, will be speaking at various Scottish outdoor shops. Places are free but limited and seats can be booked from the stores.

**Monday 23 November, 7pm**

Cotswold Outdoor Store, Aberdeen

**Tuesday 1 December, 7.30pm**

Tiso, Dundee

**Wednesday 2 December, 7.30pm**

Tiso, Highland Gateway, Perth

**Thursday 3 December, 7.30pm**

Tiso, Inverness

**Tuesday 8 December, 7.30pm**

Tiso, Edinburgh Outdoor Experience

**Wednesday 9 December, 7.30pm**

Tiso, Glasgow Outdoor Experience

**Thurs 10 December, 7pm**

Cotswold Outdoor store, Stirling

**Tuesday 5 January, 7pm**

Cotswold Outdoor Store, Partick,

**Wednesday 6 January, 7pm**

Cotswold Outdoor Store, Edinburgh

**Wednesday 10 February, 8pm**

Speaker: 'Heavy' Whalley

Mountain Cafe, Aviemore

**Wednesday 17 February, 8pm**

Mountain Cafe, Aviemore

*(Booking essential for Aviemore talks)*

# GEAR

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## New gear



### Hydro Flask

Launched in the UK this autumn, Hydro Flask is an award-winning American brand of insulated stainless steel food and drink containers. In a clever little bit of PR, a flask was recently sent to The Great Outdoors team by post, filled with ice. The ice was still frozen on arrival and, indeed, it had only partially melted 24 hours after it was despatched by Royal Mail. Impressive.

[Hydroflask.com](http://Hydroflask.com)



### Opinel

#### No.8 Anniversary Knife

Happy 125th to Opinel. To mark the occasion the French brand has released a commemorative edition of its best-selling pocket knife. It's decorated with a sharp-looking design – the handiwork of Mathieu Gazaiz, winner of a contest held by the brand.

[whitbyandco.co.uk](http://whitbyandco.co.uk)

### Protrek

#### Challenger Sock

This medium-weight Merino wool sock has a high heel design that sits just above the ankle in an effort to prevent rubbing, particularly with low ankle boots. There's also added cushioning around the toes and the shin. It's unisex and available in sizes 3-15.

[hj.co.uk](http://hj.co.uk)



### Outdoor Research

#### Illuminator Sensor Glove

This alpine glove uses a membrane called Ventia for waterproofing and PrimaLoft Silver synthetic insulation to hold in the heat. The goat leather fingers should provide some hardness (useful for winter scrambling) and tech users will appreciate its touch-screen compatible thumb and index-finger.

[outdoorresearch.com](http://outdoorresearch.com)



## Jötnar

### Fenrir Jacket

The relatively new British brand has released a few new garments for this winter. Along with salopettes and softshell trousers it's released a women's version of its existing Fenrir hydrophobic micro-down jacket. The hooded mid layer has an athletic fit, uses an 850 fill power goose down under DWR-treated nylon and comes in four 'fruits of the forest' colours. A size medium weighs 315g.

[jottnar.com](http://jottnar.com)



## Keen

### Liberty Ridge

£149.99

1.42kg

[Keenfootwear.com](http://Keenfootwear.com)

These boots are a blend of old and new; a classic shell of hardy-full grain leather with a distinctly modern, typically Keen look. They're the brand's "flagship hiking collection for 2015," designed for "technical ascents and longer backpacking trips."

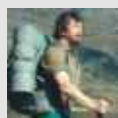
The sole unit feels rigid while shock is absorbed by an integrated heel cushion. The padding around the ankle is generous and overall the compact (somewhat stubby) shape makes them feel agile rather than lumbering. On rocky terrain the multi-directional lugs give good grip, though on one grassy descent in the rain they did slip a touch. Perhaps the lugs could be a bit more aggressive to stop this but that would likely take away from their lightweight, agile feel.

It's the waterproofing of these boots that impresses me the most. The Keen.Dry membrane really holds up, and on top of this there are very few seams (sometimes a flashpoint for water entry) thanks to the single-piece leather design. On a boggy day in the Brecon Beacons my feet stayed completely dry, and I had confidence to really splash about. It was possible to submerge the boots to about three-quarters of the way up the tongue. On a fast-paced hike on a warmish September day they also didn't seem to get clammy and breathed well.

They aren't designed for winter mountains, but for three-season technical ascents and long backpacks, they are as Keen intended, very well suited.

Will Renwick

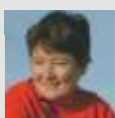
## TGO's gear reviewers



### Chris Townsend

Height 5'8" Boot size 9  
Clothing size Medium  
(with short legs!)

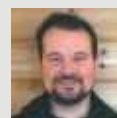
Chris Townsend has written 17 books on the outdoors, including the award-winning *The Backpacker's Handbook*. Among his walking achievements, he was the first person to complete a continuous round of all the Munros and Tops and the first to walk the 1600-mile length of the Canadian Rockies. Chris has been reviewing gear for *The Great Outdoors* since 1991.



### Judy Armstrong

Height 5'2" Boot size 3.5/4  
Clothing size 12/Women's Medium

Judy Armstrong has been testing gear for *The Great Outdoors* since 2005 but has been hillwalking and mountaineering for 30 years. Originally from New Zealand, Judy lives in the North York Moors National Park and also has a base in the French Alps.



### Kirk Watson

Height 6'0" Boot size 11  
Clothing size Large

Kirk has been hillwalking since he was five and climbing since he was 13. He works as an outdoor instructor and holds the Mountain Instructor Certificate, spending most of the winter teaching mountaineering and climbing. During summer he coaches canoeing and mountaineering, and makes films. He's climbed and walked in many countries and spent six years living in Antarctica.

THE UK'S  
MOST  
EXPERIENCED  
GEAR  
TESTING  
TEAM

# Winter Base Layers

Chris Townsend reviews a selection of next-to-skin tops for the colder months

**W**ARM BASE LAYERS are excellent in freezing winter weather, feeling snug and cosy next to the skin. To be comfortable when you're working hard as well as being warm they need to handle moisture vapour and sweat well, lifting it off your skin quickly and transporting it through the fabric. Many fabrics do this by having a bi-component structure whereby the inner layer picks up moisture fast and transmits it to the smoother outer layer where it can spread out and evaporate. Such fabrics may be synthetic or a mix of wool and synthetic. Pure wool absorbs moisture into the fibres and feels dry next to the skin when damp. It moves the moisture through the fabric more slowly than synthetics but, in my experience, feels comfortable over a wider temperature range. Wool/synthetic mixes are closer to wool in performance than 100% synthetics and may well be the best of both worlds, being faster drying and a bit harder wearing than pure wool but more comfortable (and less smelly) than synthetics.

No base layer, whatever the material or structure, will stay dry all the time, whatever the makers claim. Sweat heavily climbing a hill and any base layer will be damp when you stop at the top. What matters then is how comfortable it feels when damp, how quickly it moves moisture off your skin and how quickly it dries.

Whatever the fabric, thicker garments are warmer and slower drying than thinner ones. For really strenuous exercise – trail running, mountain biking, cross-country skiing – I'd avoid the warmest base layers. For hillwalking and backpacking in winter they're fine though. Some are designed to always be worn next to the skin and have a tight though stretchy fit while others can also be worn as mid layers. Indeed, a thick base layer worn over a thin one can be a very effective combination for wicking away moisture quickly and keeping you warm.

*Notes: All weights are for Men's Medium unless otherwise stated.*



## Check for this

### Antimicrobial Treatment

Base layers get sweaty and can stink. Wool has natural antimicrobial properties and is the best material for wearing for long periods as it doesn't smell. Synthetics smell badly fairly quickly unless given an antimicrobial treatment, usually silver. With these treatments synthetics stay fresh a bit longer.





## Rab

MeCo 165 Long Sleeve Zip Tee

£70 233g

fabric, long zip

nothing

**Fabric:** MeCo – 65% merino wool with 35% 37.5 Technology recycled polyester  
**Neck:** zipped neck  
**Cuffs:** plain  
**Sizes:** men XS-XXL, women 8-16  
[www.rab.equipment](http://www.rab.equipment)

MeCo is a mix of merino wool and recycled polyester with 37.5 Activated Carbon Technology (formerly Cocona), which is made from 'naturally derived materials' that wick moisture faster and dry more quickly than other fabrics. The wool is ethically sourced from Australia. MeCo is a soft fabric and very comfortable to wear – I can't tell the difference from pure merino wool – and it does move moisture and dry pretty quickly. Like pure merino MeCo doesn't smell after prolonged wear either – I've worn this top every day on two week walks without washing it and it's smelt as fresh at the end as the start. It's as close to a perfect base layer fabric as anything I've tried.

The 165 Long Sleeve Zip Tee has a high collar and a longer front zip than many zipped base layers, which is better for ventilation. The sleeves are long enough to cover the backs of the hands and loose enough to be rolled up in hot weather. They don't ride up when you stretch. The length is good too so it doesn't pull out of your trousers. The top is designed to be close-fitting – Rab call it a 'slim fit'. Preferring looser garments I went for a size larger than usual and have found it fine. Rab also says that MeCo tops 'should be worn next-to-skin'. I've occasionally worn this top over a thinner base layer and it's worked well though.

The 165 weight is ideal for three-season use – I find it a bit hot in summer. There is a warmer 190 version available too.



## Sherpa

Tsepun 1/4 Zip

£55 288g

fast wicking, comfortable, warm

narrow non-stretch cuffs

**Fabric:** Dry-Zone 82% nylon/ 18% polyester  
**Neck:** zipped neck  
**Cuffs:** narrow  
**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women XS-XL (Dikila Zip Tee)  
[www.sherpaadventuregear.co.uk](http://www.sherpaadventuregear.co.uk)

The Tsepun is made from a soft bi-component double-weave fabric. The slightly fuzzy polyester inner moves moisture fast while the more open weave smooth nylon outer spreads the moisture out so it can evaporate and also resists abrasion. I've found the fabric efficient and comfortable over a surprising temperature range. It has a silver ion anti-bacterial treatment to prevent smells that has worked so far.

The garment design looks more like a mid layer than a base layer due to the double fabric colour contrast hem and cuffs plus the bonded chest pocket. However worn next to the skin it's very comfortable and wicks moisture quickly. The fabric only stretches a little but the fit is roomy, despite Sherpa describing it as 'streamlined'. I can wear the medium size over another thick base layer and have room to spare. The neck zip is good for ventilation, though it could be longer, and the double-fabric collar is cosy. The hem stays tucked into trousers well and the sleeves don't ride up. The cuffs are quite narrow though and can't be pushed up the arms very far in warm weather. The little pocket is big enough for a compass and a small GPS unit or smartphone. There are no seams over the shoulders.

The Tsepun is extremely comfortable and my favourite of the synthetic tops tested.



### Seams

Seams should be flat sewn so they don't rub. Ideally there should be no seams across the shoulders.



Check for this

## Body & Sleeve Length

Garments should be long enough to stay tucked in trousers when you bend or stretch. Sleeves should be long enough and cut with enough room under the armpits not to ride up when you reach out. Sleeves with thumb loops are useful as these cover the backs of the hands and ensure there's no gap with gloves.



## Icebreaker

Apex Long Sleeve Half Zip

£110

326g



warmth, thumb loops



expensive

**Fabric:** 260 gsm merino wool

**Neck:** zipped neck

**Cuffs:** thumb loops

**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women XS-XL (Tech Top)

[www.uk.icebreaker.com](http://www.uk.icebreaker.com)

The Apex top is a lovely garment made from New Zealand merino wool that works as a base or mid layer. It's pretty warm and definitely a cold weather top. As expected of a 100% merino wool garment it is very comfortable, removes moisture vapour quickly and doesn't smell.

The design is good with a snug double layer collar and long sleeves with thumb loops. The knit is quite stretchy and the sleeves can easily be pushed up. The neck zip is good for ventilation but it's not half-length and could be a bit longer. The tiny welded pocket on the sleeve seems pretty pointless. The length is good and the garment doesn't ride up. There are no seams over the shoulders. Sizing is generous – I can easily wear the medium as a mid layer.

Comfort, warmth and performance make this an excellent top. It is expensive though.



## Berghaus

Long Sleeve Zip Neck

£50

287g



price, warmth, zip neck



zip could be longer

**Fabric:** Argentium polyester

**Neck:** zipped collar

**Cuffs:** double-fabric

**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women 8-18

[www.berghaus.com](http://www.berghaus.com)

For once this top doesn't have a fancy name, just one that describes what it is. It's a straightforward base layer with no features other than the zip neck. It's made from Berghaus's own-brand wicking polyester, which has a smooth outer and a grid pattern inner that moves moisture away from the skin very quickly and is warm for the weight. There's a silver ion treatment to stop it smelling, which works well on a new garment.

The fabric stretches so the top can be close-fitting without being restrictive. The zip allows for ventilation though it could be a little longer for this. The sleeves are quite long and can be pulled over the back of the hands and also pushed up to cool the arms. Length is good and I didn't have any problems with the garment riding up. There are no seams over the shoulders.

The top can be worn as a base or mid layer and is comfortable and effective in both cases. The price is fairly low, making it a good choice as a cold weather top.



## Check for this

### Fit

A close fit is more efficient at moving moisture and drying fast than a baggy one but garments shouldn't be restrictive. Some have elastic fibres added so they can stretch and move with you.



## Mountain Equipment

Eclipse Hooded Zip T

£90 319g (L)

✓ warmth, thumb loops

✗ high collar

**Fabric:** Polartec Power Dry 200 & 160 fleece

**Neck:** offset zip

**Cuffs:** thumb loops

**Sizes:** men S-XXXL, women 8-16

[www.mountain-equipment.co.uk](http://www.mountain-equipment.co.uk)

Mountain Equipment says the Eclipse is a 'a specialist piece designed for serious winter use' and the unusual design certainly fits this description. The top has an angled half-length zip and a high collar that covers my mouth and nose plus a hood. In a blizzard I can imagine this design working really well but for general use it's unnecessary and somewhat awkward. You can just do the zip up part way but then there's a large flappy piece of fabric on one side and the hood only fits loosely. Also, if you have a beard it's very easy to catch it in the zip even though there's a beard guard – as I've discovered!

The Eclipse Hooded Zip T also has a small chest pocket that will hold a compass, GPS unit or smartphone, and thumb loops, which I really like. The back is long and it doesn't ride up. There are no seams across the shoulders

The Eclipse is made from Power Dry fleece, which has a smooth outer and a waffle grid inner, making for a fabric that is very warm for the weight. There are two weights of Power Dry used with lighter fabric in areas where maximum warmth isn't as important. Power Dry is a soft flexible fabric that's comfortable to wear and which wicks moisture really quickly. It has an anti-microbial treatment that works well, at least when the garment is new.

I like the fabric and many of the design features of this top but I'm not very keen on the collar. I'd prefer the £85 Eclipse Zip Tee which has a standard zip and collar and no hood but is otherwise the same. I also think both garments are better as mid layers rather than base layers for hill walkers.



## Sprayway

Nesus 1/2 Zip

£50 218g

✓ cost, merino wool

✗ short neck zip, rough feel

**Fabric:** merino wool

**Neck:** zipped collar

**Cuffs:** plain

**Sizes:** men XS-XXXL, women 8-20

[www.sprayway.com](http://www.sprayway.com)

The Nesus is made from lightweight merino wool. Sprayway doesn't give the weight but it's a bit thinner than the Smartwool and Icebreaker tops and a bit thicker than the Alpkite one. Sprayway also doesn't say anything about the source of the merino wool but it feels a bit rougher than the other merino wool garments and I find it slightly itchy. I'd rather wear this as a second layer than next to the skin. The fabric may soften with repeated washings of course.

Other than the feel the Nesus performs much like other merino wool tops, being warm when damp, moving moisture off the skin quickly, and drying fairly fast. The zipped neck is snug and warm but the zip could be longer for better ventilation. The sleeves are quite long and don't ride up and the back length ensures the top doesn't pull out of your trousers. The Nesus is quite stretchy so it clings to the body but doesn't restrict movement.

The price is low for merino wool, making this a good buy if the feel against the skin is okay.



## Montane

Primino 140G Zip Neck

£60 179g

- ✓ cost, weight, comfort
- ✗ sleeves slightly short

**Fabric:** Primino 50% merino wool/25% Primaloft/25% polyester  
**Neck:** zipped neck  
**Cuffs:** plain  
**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women 8-16  
[www.montane.co.uk](http://www.montane.co.uk)

Primino is a bicomponent fabric with merino wool on the inside to pull moisture vapour and sweat off the skin, and Primaloft and polyester on the outside to spread the moisture rapidly over the surface so it can evaporate quickly. The fabric works well and is soft and comfortable. It has a Polygiene antibacterial treatment. Merino wool doesn't smell anyway but I guess a garment that is 50% synthetic could do so.

The top has a snug collar and a zip for ventilation (which could be longer). There are no shoulder seams. Montane describe it as having a 'close body fit' and it does. The medium is fine on me next to the skin but I couldn't wear it over any other garment. The fabric does stretch so the close fit isn't restrictive. The length is good and I've had no problems with it riding up. The sleeves are very slightly on the short side though and do ride up a little when I stretch.

This is fairly low in cost for a 50% merino wool top and also quite light. For autumn to spring use it's a good choice.



## Alpkit

Kepler Long Sleeve

£39 200g

- ✓ cost, comfort, thumb loops
- ✗ no zip neck, only available from Alpkit

**Fabric:** 160gsm merino wool  
**Neck:** crew  
**Cuffs:** thumb loops  
**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women 8-14  
[www.alpkit.com](http://www.alpkit.com)

Unsurprisingly, Alpkit's new merino wool garments are much lower priced than alternatives. They can of course only be bought directly from Alpkit. The merino wool comes from New Zealand and is soft and comfortable and performs like that found in much more expensive garments, being very breathable, fast wicking and odour resistant. The 160 weight is suitable for use in all but hot weather.

The Kepler top is a simple crew neck, the only feature being the thumb loops. There are no seams over the shoulders.

The fabric stretches, which is good, as the medium size is skin tight on me and quite a bit smaller than Smartwool's medium. This is fine when worn as a base layer but I couldn't wear it over anything else.

The Kepler is also quite short and whilst I didn't have any problems with it riding up I think it could if worn with low-cut trousers.

I'd prefer to have a zip neck but at this price that's a very minor complaint. This is the best value top tested.



## Mammut

Trovat Pro Half Zip Long Sleeve

£80 177g

- ✓ weight, comfort
- ✗ more expensive than alternatives

**Fabric:** Polartec Power Wool 66% polyester/34% merino wool  
**Neck:** zipped  
**Cuffs:** double fabric  
**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women (Kira) XS-XL  
[www.mammut.ch](http://www.mammut.ch)

Polartec's new Power Wool is another bicomponent material with wool on the inside to pull moisture vapour off the skin and polyester on the outside to help it evaporate. The polyester outer is also more abrasion resistant than wool. The wool inner is in a micro-grid pattern while the outer is very smooth with a silky feel. The garment arrived late on in the testing but my first impressions are that Power Wool works well. The Trovat is more expensive than the wool mix tops from Rab and Montane though and I can't as yet see any advantage to justify that.

The Trovat fits fairly closely but the fabric stretches so it doesn't feel tight. The front zip is a bit longer than on other garments apart from Rab's, which is better for ventilation. The sleeves are long and don't ride up. The length is fine and the Trovat doesn't pull out of trousers. Comfort is very good due to the wool against the skin. The slick outer stops mid layers from binding in any way. The shoulder seams are offset. The Trovat is also lightweight.





### Collar

Zipped collars allow good ventilation control, especially if the zip is quite long. If high enough to cover the neck they are warmer than crew necks when closed. However some soft light fibres need reinforcing to form a collar that will stand up. A short scarf or neck gaiter can be used with crew neck tops.



## The North Face

Warm Long Sleeve Crew Neck

£40 174g (L)

- ✓ cost, fast wicking, fast drying, warm
- ✗ no zip neck

**Fabric:** HyActive hollow core polypropylene  
**Neck:** crew  
**Cuffs:** plain  
**Sizes:** men S-XL, women XS-L  
[www.thenorthface.co.uk](http://www.thenorthface.co.uk)

Low in cost, this top is the best value of the synthetic tops tested. It's a basic crew neck design made from a double layer of soft fabric with hollow core fibres. The polypropylene material wicks moisture very fast and dries very quickly. It doesn't stink after use either, belying polypropylene's poor reputation in this regard.

As the name says this base layer is a warm top – very warm for the weight – and definitely a garment for cold weather.

The top has long sleeves and a long back and neither ride up. The fabric stretches and the sleeves can easily be pushed up. There are no seams over the shoulders. The fit is a little on the small side. The Large is fairly close-fitting on me. The weight is low, making this a top that could be carried for camp wear.



## Smartwool

NTS Mid 250 Asymmetrical Crew

£84.99 258g

- ✓ warmth
- ✗ no zip neck

**Fabric:** 250gsm merino wool  
**Neck:** crew  
**Cuffs:** double fabric  
**Sizes:** men S-XXL, women XS-XL  
[www.smartwool.com](http://www.smartwool.com)

A simple crew-neck design, this top is warm and comfortable and has all the expected properties of top quality merino wool. The Asymmetrical part of the name refers to the pattern and not to the material, which is the same thickness throughout.

The top is long and so are the sleeves. Neither ride up when you stretch. The shoulder seams are offset. Warmth is excellent and the top is very comfortable. I'd rather have a zip neck though, especially in this weight of merino wool. The knit is quite stretchy and the cut is quite roomy – I can comfortably wear it over another base layer.

The asymmetric pattern with stripes and plain sections is unusual. Of course when worn as a base layer it won't be seen but I guess if you need to strip down to it in a warm bar after a day out it'll attract some looks!



## Brynje

Wool Thermo T-Shirt

£32 103g

- ✓ ultralight, very breathable, fast drying
- ✗ nothing

**Fabric:** 80% merino wool/20% polyamid  
**Neck:** crew  
**Sizes:** men XS-XL, women XS-XL  
[www.nordiclifeco.uk](http://www.nordiclifeco.uk)

This top is completely different to the others reviewed. It's not warm in itself, being basically an old-fashioned string vest. It's made from merino wool not cotton though with some polyester added for extra durability. Whilst most base layers can be worn as standalone garments the Thermo T-Shirt really is underwear. Worn under another wicking layer it adds a surprising amount of warmth as heat is trapped in the myriad holes. I've found it comfortable under both merino wool and synthetic base layers. Moisture passes through it very quickly so it stays pretty dry next to the skin. And if it does get damp it dries extremely fast as there's not much actual material to absorb moisture. Being mostly merino wool it doesn't smell after many days wear.

The Thermo T-Shirt is quite long with an extended back and stays firmly tucked into trousers. The latest version has solid fabric over the shoulders to protect against wear from a pack plus offset shoulder seams.

If you want to boost the warmth and efficiency of your clothing with an ultralight garment the Thermo T-shirt is an excellent choice. ▲

# GPS devices

As smartphone technology moves ever forward, is it still worth carrying a standalone GPS? Or is a GPS enabled wristwatch a worthwhile investment?

Chris Townsend, Emily Rodway and Will Renwick have been experimenting with some of the latest devices

**THERE ARE MANY** different ways of navigating through the hills in 2015. Most of us still carry a map and compass, but many supplement that with a GPS-enabled device – a handheld satnav, a mobile phone, tablet computer or even a wristwatch.

Each has its own advantages: handheld GPS receivers designed for use in the outdoors are built to be sturdy and hard to break and should have good water resistance. But is it worth shelling out for a satnav when you can access Ordnance Survey mapping on your phone? Conscious of the ever developing capabilities of smartphones, GPS manufacturers now offer vast ranges of functionality in their units, but as a hillwalker it's likely that if you're buying one, it's for its navigational capabilities. All that other stuff is a bonus, rather than the main event.

Ever since handheld GPS units became available, there have been concerns about people navigating by digital means alone, but there's no denying that GPS can make life easier, even if it's just to find a quick grid reference and check you are where you think you are. If that's all you're using GPS for, then a smartphone (with an appropriate app, ideally offering Ordnance Survey mapping) is more than sufficient, and will offer plenty of other functionality too.

But many of us spend far too much time staring at our smartphones, and part of the reason we spend time in the hills is to escape the nagging demands of text messaging and social media. In which case, the devices reviewed here allow you to switch off from all that, while also providing all the benefits of contemporary technology to reassure you that you're on the right track... plus a few bells and whistles.

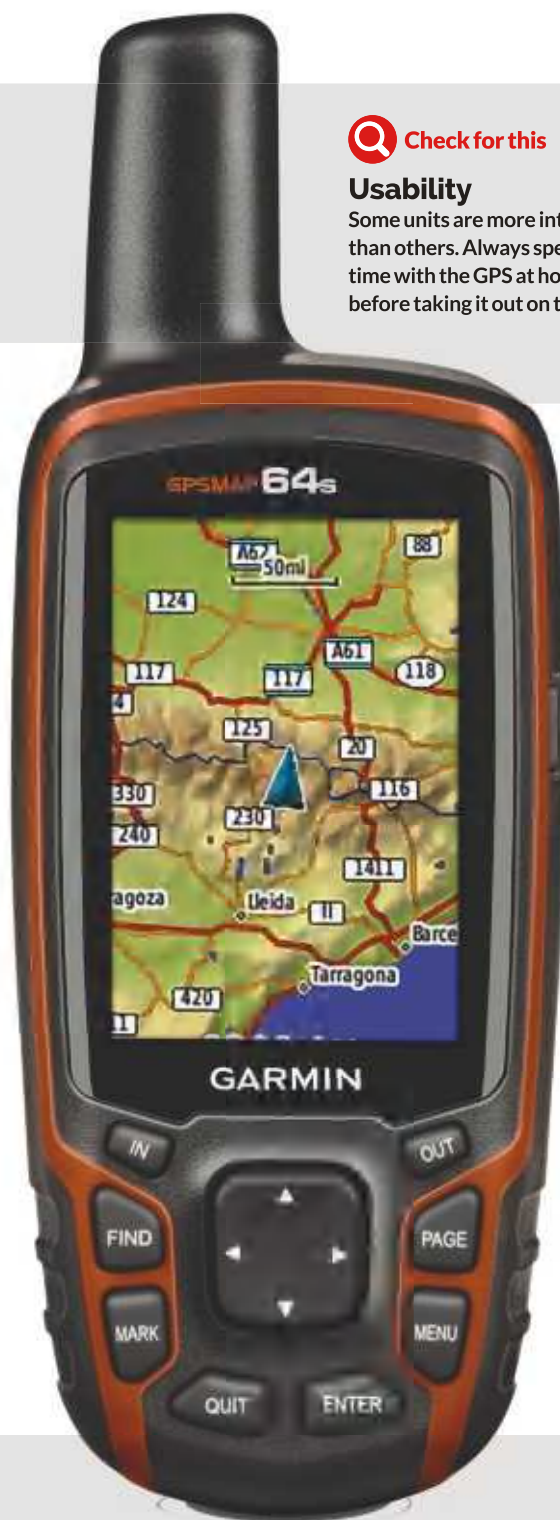
## HANDHELD DEVICES



Check for this

### Usability

Some units are more intuitive than others. Always spend some time with the GPS at home first before taking it out on the hills.





## Smartphones for navigation

Most of the vast numbers of smartphones available are suitable for use as GPS units with the right mapping apps (see page 79). Apps are generally designed for iOS and Android operating systems. Most smartphones aren't intended for outdoor use and so aren't waterproof or shockproof. This needn't be a problem – I've only ever had this type of phone – as there are protective cases available and even a waterproofing treatment (see below).

There are tougher waterproof smartphones available.

**Memory-Map** makes the GPS TX series, which are waterproof and shockproof. Examples are the £279 TX3, which has a 3.5" touchscreen and weighs 207g, and the £459 TX4 – OS Explorer GB, which comes with 1:25,000 OS Explorer maps for the whole of the UK. It has a 4" touchscreen and weighs 231g. The batteries on both phones last 10-14 hours with continuous GPS use.

Other waterproof Android phones include quite a few in the **Sony Xperia** series including the £429, 138g Z5 Compact with 4.6" touchscreen; the £629, 180g Z5 Premium with 5.5" touchscreen; and the £199, 136g M4 Aqua with 5" touchscreen. From **Samsung**

there's the £275, 153g Galaxy S4 Active with 5" touchscreen and the £180, 154g Galaxy Xcover 3 with 4.5" touchscreen while **HTC** has the £350, 154g Desire Eye with 5.2" touchscreen; and **Kyocera** the £260, 187g Brigadier with 4.5" screen. Especially rugged are the £249.98, 179g CAT B15Q which has a 4" touchscreen, and the £309, 235g Toughphone Defender with 4" screen. And finally, **Decathlon** sell what they have dubbed the world's first 'mountainproof' smartphone, the **Quechua** phone (250g), which runs on Android and costs £199.99 but is sometimes available for less.

### Cases & Protection

If your smartphone isn't waterproof you could treat it with **Flash Flood** ([www.nanostate.co.uk](http://www.nanostate.co.uk)), a super-hydrophobic coating that "should generally make it waterproof for 6 to 12 months." A bottle costs £22.50 and will waterproof three smartphones.

Alternatively there are transparent cases that protect against rain and dust and in which smartphones can be used. I've used these for several years and have found them very effective. Good examples come from **Aquapac**, **SealLine** and **Sea to Summit**. **Chris Townsend**

## Garmin

GPS 64s

**£279\*/£349.99\*\***  **260g**

\*with Topo UK Light \*\*with OS 1:50,000

 Size, user-friendliness

 No battery included

**Size:** 61 x 160 x 36mm  
**Screen:** 36mm x 55mm  
**Touchscreen:** yes  
**Electronic compass:** yes  
**Barometer/altimeter:** yes  
**Battery:** AA or battery pack (neither supplied)  
**Battery life:** 16 hours  
**OS mapping:** enabled  
[www.garmin.com/en-GB](http://www.garmin.com/en-GB)

I was up and running with this GPS very quickly. Finding my way around the device itself was simple enough thanks to the clear and tidy menus and easy scrolling via the arrows on the keypad. The route-planning was straightforward as well. I'd say I went from not having picked up the device before to heading out on my own newly created route in about 20 minutes.

The GPSMap 64s looks like a mobile phone from the early 2000s with its long body and pointed aerial. It is compact however, and wasn't intrusive in my coat pocket. It's relatively robust as well, being shockproof, and also waterproof enough

to withstand rain and splashes (but not any prolonged submersion). The device comes pre-installed with Garmin's Topo UK and Ireland Light map. I was immediately suspicious of this on first use, simply because it wasn't Ordnance Survey. However, though it is basic this mapping does provide just enough information for navigation on foot, showing 50-metre contours, paths and trails – basically enough for a light jaunt in the countryside. For anything more I'd recommend picking up one of the bundles which come with a mini SD that transfers OS mapping. Maps can also be downloaded onto the device's 3.5GB memory. I tested it with the 1:50,000 SD card.

The device's screen does seem small and a little low-res but when out testing it this was no hindrance, mainly thanks to the fast loading speed of the map when scaling via the useful 'In' and 'Out' buttons. At no point did I throw it done with frustration anyway. I also found the accuracy impressive – on stepping outside I was instantly located to within 12m despite being in a deep valley.

Supposedly by utilising a GLONASS receiver alongside GPS (as this model does) the time it takes to lock on to a position is on average 20% faster than when using GPS alone.

Other inbuilt features of this model include a barometric altimeter, a compass, and Bluetooth for wireless sharing of routes and for linking up with a heart-rate monitor. One of the selling points used by Garmin for this product has been its ability to synchronise with smartphones. The device is compatible with the Garmin Connect app, which synchronises with the device to allow friends to locate and track your progress.

To charge it, there are two options. You can either use AA batteries or insert a battery pack and charge the device through the mains, both options will supposedly offer a charge of around 16 hours. You'll have

to source either means yourself, but still it's nice to have a chance anyway I suppose. I personally like disposable battery powered devices as you can carry as much potential power as you're willing to bear rather than having to worry about locating charging points.

**Will Renwick**

**Finding my way around the device was simple enough thanks to the clear and tidy menus**

## Garmin

### eTrex Touch 25

£209.99 159g with batteries

✓ Tough, comfortable to hold, Geocaching potential (for when the kids get older!)

✗ Accompanying software

**Size:** 58 x 102 x 33mm

**Screen:** 36 x 55mm

**Touchscreen:** yes

**Electronic compass:** yes

**Barometer/altimeter:** yes

**Battery:** 2 x AA

**Battery life:** up to 16 hours

**OS Mapping:** available via SD card (49.99 for a National Park, £199.99 for Great Britain) or download

[www.garmin.com/en-GB](http://www.garmin.com/en-GB)



#### Check for this

##### Batteries

Recording tracks eats up batteries. If relying on your GPS for navigation, always carry spares or a charger. The batteries will diminish quicker in cold weather.

#### Check for this

##### Touchscreen

If it's going to be cold enough to need gloves, buy specialist ones with conductive finger tips to enable the touchscreen to be used.

#### Check for this

##### Screen size

Bigger screens are better for Ordnance Survey mapping.

The eTrex Touch 25 is described by Garmin as their "recreational family navigator" and so comes loaded with 250,000 Geocaches. I can see the appeal of Geocaching (a kind of contemporary orienteering crossed with a treasure hunt, utilising the power of GPS satellites) as a family activity, and this device makes local caches easy to find as well as providing information about each cache, historical information about the area where relevant, and other users' reports on each caching experience.

And for hillwalking? On first opening the box, the unit feels sturdy and hard to break (having smashed two smartphone screens within the last month, this is reassuring) and the plastic housing is satisfyingly grippy. It slips easily into a pocket and feels comfortable, if a little weighty, in the hand. The unit located GPS satellites efficiently as soon as I was outside, although it did temporarily lose signal in dense woods.

The 3.6cm x 5.5cm screen feels small when you're used to a smartphone, but I got used to it soon enough. However, I wouldn't want to be without a paper map as well – not only for the back-up in case of batteries expiring (I'd definitely recommend turning down the screen brightness to minimise battery use, and carry spares), but also because only seeing such a small area at any one time meant I found myself zooming in and out frequently. It displays the route you are walking (your 'track') as a pale blue line and any downloaded or pre-planned routes as a thick pink line.

The device is operated via both a touchscreen and a button on the side. I found the touchscreen responsive, although it lagged somewhat when wet and was difficult to use with gloved fingers. Starting from the home screen, the screen enables you to switch between different menus for different activities ('Hike', 'Mountain Bike', 'Geocache', etc) and then you can drag around the map or 'pinch and drag' to zoom in and out, like you would on a smartphone. Waypoints can also be added by touching the screen or via the button on the side (to mark your current location). Either way, adding waypoints seems to be the most efficient means of getting a grid reference, other than reading it off the map, which isn't easy on a small screen. There may be other ways of doing it, but I couldn't find them among the many options.

The button on the side of the device takes you to a menu of icons including 'Setup', 'Compass', etc, each themselves selected via the touchscreen. This menu is also where you go to open up pre-loaded routes. The numerous other options

('Altimeter', 'Area Calculator', 'Sun and Moon', 'Photo Viewer'...) vary according to which activity menu you selected at the start – strangely, the altimeter is included under 'Mountain Bike' or 'Hunt' but not under 'Hike'. You may be able to customise the menus but, again, it

was hard to work out how to do so.

As you may have gathered, I wouldn't describe the eTrex Touch 25 as utterly intuitive, but then I'm not a regular user of handheld GPS devices. Once I got used to it, it was easy enough to use on a basic level, although I only dipped my toe into the manifold settings and options provided. If you're into gadgets and gizmos, I expect there's a lot more on offer.

I also spent some time using Garmin's 'Base Camp' software, which can be used to print maps (as you would with other bespoke digital mapping software but it's not possible to print at scale) as well as to take routes on and off your GPS, plan activities and share 'Adventures' (interactive timelines of your trip, with photos, videos, notes etc) with other users, and to purchase 1:25,000 Ordnance Survey mapping (as 'BirdsEye Select Raster Maps'). I'm afraid I found this software less than intuitive and rather frustrating. It was easier to just load mapping from an SD card.

There is another Garmin program, based online, called Garmin Connect, which you can align your GPS to using downloadable software called Garmin Express. Connect is focused on fitness and sport (sections are dedicated to 'Goals' and 'Workouts' and you can monitor calories burned and golf scores) but is also an alternative means of downloading tracks, and is a rather more attractive digital environment than Base Camp. However, it doesn't appear to show OS mapping (unless I'm missing something, which is altogether possible – this stuff ain't half complicated!).

Emily Rodway


You only see a small area at any one time, so I found myself zooming in and out frequently



## Satmap

Active 12

**£400** with GB OS 1:50,000  **228g**

 Big screen, clear picture, Bluetooth

 Price, bulky

**Size:** 75 x 30 x 130mm

**Screen:** 55 x 70mm

**Touchscreen:** no

**Electronic compass:** yes

**Barometer/altimeter:** yes

**Battery:** rechargeable

**Battery life:** 20+ hours on power-saving mode

**OS mapping:** Yes

[www.satmap.com](http://www.satmap.com)

The Active 12 looks almost identical to Satmap's original Active 10 – the first GPS built specifically to host OS mapping. It's chunky and solid, has a large screen with surrounding buttons and the same mini joystick. The main visible difference is the colour of the buttons. But the changes go deeper than that.

Firstly, the newer model has updated its LCD screen, adding twice the clarity of the last version. Then there are the brand-new additions: a barometric altimeter and Bluetooth capabilities to enable the syncing of a heart-rate monitor and the sharing of routes between two different Satmap devices. There's an extra 128MB of RAM as well – potential for a much larger library of routes.

Taken as itself, the Active 12 comes pre-installed with the as-crude-as-they-come World Base Map and the slightly more detailed GB road mapping. To gain access to Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 or 1:50,000 mapping requires either purchasing a product and map bundle at an extra cost or buying any extra SD cards with map packages on them. These packages can be quite costly (something not at all exclusive to Satmap).

The Bluetooth function should be useful for groups, as it allows the possibility of sharing pre-planned route wirelessly. A route planned on an OS backdrop can be shared to a device without OS software, however the mapping will not show up with it – only the base software of the device. The Bluetooth was quick and easy to activate, the devices quick to synch and the routes quick to exchange.

On to the overall user-friendliness. Those new to Satmap will find the interface takes a little bit of getting used to. There isn't a button that takes you directly to a base menu, everything is somewhat layered on top of each other. For instance, to get from

the map to your stored routes requires going back to one menu and then back to another. That said, most people should develop a good understanding of the system within about an hour of playing around with it.

Route-planning on the device is simple – aided by the toggle and buttons (delete marker, add marker etc) and when zooming on the map I found the picture loading very speedy. Downloading routes from Satmap's website [satmap-xpedition.com](http://satmap-xpedition.com) was simple enough. You plan out the route with the software, save it to your PC as a GPX file, and then transfer via a USB cable. It's possible to also use the OS Maps route planner for this as well.

On the go I was able to position myself to an accuracy of 10m – though this wasn't entirely useful as I was only able to test out the device with OS 1:50,000. Supposedly it has potential for 1m accuracy if enough satellites are available. Like most devices, it comes with an option to see the positioning of the satellites above you.

It's possible to increase the brightness via a side button though to decrease it requires going into the settings. I had it on a mid-level setting on a sunny day and could see the picture clearly, and the rechargeable battery lasted well on a good day's walk without needing to be switched to power-saving mode.

The large screen has its obvious benefits and the robustness of the device itself is useful (it's also waterproof but not submersible), but then these factors do combine to make for quite a cumbersome thing to carry; it felt very noticeable in my pocket.

**Will Renwick**



## Apps for nav

I regularly use the excellent, free **ViewRanger** app, last reviewed in the February 2014 TGO when I gave it five stars (review available online). Apart from ViewRanger there are several useful GPS apps for smartphone, all of which work without a phone signal. I downloaded all those below and found they worked fast.

One of the simplest to use is **OS Locate**. Open this and you get a grid reference, the altitude and an electronic compass. Used in conjunction with a map this is an excellent app. If you have a phone signal you can also share your position via text message or email or on Facebook or Twitter.

The Ordnance Survey also has a more sophisticated app called **OS MapFinder** which shows your position on a map. The app is free and comes with a basic road map. Ordnance Survey maps cost £0.69 each for Landranger 100km<sup>2</sup> tiles and £1.99 each for Explorer ones. Updates are free. The app is easy to use. Tap the location and the grid reference appears. You can also tap to create trails with the distance and walking time provided and record routes.

Anquet has a slightly more complex app called the **Outdoor Map Navigator**. Again the app is free, along with sample maps. There are a wide range of maps and map sizes available. Example costs for maps are £7.50 for an 8,000 km<sup>2</sup> Landranger tile and £15 for a 25,000 km<sup>2</sup> one. Landranger mapping for the whole of the UK is £100. The app shows your position on the map and gives the grid reference and the altitude. You can record a track and view a route but you can't add waypoints or plot a route, except on a PC.

**Memory-Map's** app has more functions than the above three listed above, making your smartphone much the same as a standalone GPS, just like ViewRanger. You can create waypoints and routes, either on your smartphone or PC and masses of information is provided as well as grid reference and altitude. The app can be customised as well and there's a huge number of options. The app is free and comes with a road map. OS Landranger for the whole of Great Britain costs £100.

**Chris Townsend**

## Garmin

Epix

£373

87g

✓ Good battery life

✗ Expensive, complicated to use

**Size:** 50.8 x 53.3 x 17.8mm

**Touchscreen:** yes

**Electronic compass:** yes

**Barometer/altimeter:** yes

**Battery:** rechargeable

**Battery life:** up to 50 hours in UltraTrac mode, up to 24 hours in GPS mode, up to 16 weeks in watch mode

**OS Mapping:** no

[www.suunto.com](http://www.suunto.com)



The Garmin epix is a powerful and complex GPS watch with a myriad functions. Unfortunately I found it difficult and frustrating to use. The controls are not intuitive and the online manual, despite being 28 pages of densely packed data, fails to give all the information needed. The watch has a touchscreen but at such a small size this is difficult to use, at least with my stubby fingers.

The epix is a chunky waterproof watch with a wide strap. It took a while to get used to it on my wrist and the square shape catches on clothing a bit more than circular watches. A USB connector is provided for recharging the battery. This can be used with a battery pack for recharging out in the hills. It has a proprietary connection so you can't use a standard micro USB cable.

The epic has five buttons for running through the functions and menus. These are labelled inside the display but the lettering is so tiny and dull that it's hard to read except in bright light so the functions need memorising. This isn't a big problem – it's when you get into the displays and menus that it becomes difficult. Once set up the watch will give a grid reference but getting an accurate one for your position requires care. This is because you have to select the map page and then tap the tip of the arrow marking where you are so crosshairs appear. Tap the crosshairs and a menu appears. Select Review and the grid reference appears in tiny letters. With some practice I could mostly get an accurate reading but I wouldn't like to rely on

**A screen with the grid reference would improve it enormously**

being able to tap the map at exactly the right spot with cold fingers on a stormy day. The basic colour map itself is useless for navigation. You can zoom in and out but there's not much detail. You can buy more detailed maps which I expect would make finding your position easier. 1:50,000 mapping for the whole of the UK costs £200.

Overall the GPS function is designed more for recording and following routes than finding your position. While routes are useful I do think the main function of a GPS unit should be to give your location and that this should be clear and easy to

access. With the epix it isn't. A screen with the grid reference would improve it enormously.

The epix is also a fitness training watch

with all the information and data recording required.

For many functions and for extra data the epix can be paired with a compatible phone via Bluetooth. My Sony Xperia SP isn't listed as compatible and when I tried to pair the devices the phone said it was paired but the watch said it wasn't. If you want to use this feature you need to check you have a compatible phone. I don't think this is very useful for the hills anyway.

Overall I think the epix has potential but the interface needs simplifying and it really should give a grid reference without need of tapping a map. You need to be prepared to spend a long time practising all the functions and studying the manual to make the most of it.

**Chris Townsend**



## Suunto

### Ambit3 Peak Sapphire

£405  94g

✓ Tough, waterproof, auto altimeter/barometer mode, track back, good battery life

✗ Expensive

**Size:** 50 x 50 x 18mm

**Touchscreen:** no

**Electronic compass:** yes

**Barometer/altimeter:** yes

**Battery:** rechargeable

**Battery life:** 30 hours with 5 second GPS accuracy, 200 hours with 1 minute accuracy

**OS Mapping:** no

[www.suunto.com](http://www.suunto.com)



Smartphones may seem to have ended the need for wristwatches. After all, when your phone tells the time why bother with another device? However I still find it useful to quickly check the time by glancing at my wrist. Being able to also see altimeter, barometer, compass and GPS readings is also very convenient.

Of course finding this information needs to be easy and it is with the Ambit3 Peak Sapphire GPS watch. Like previous versions of the Ambit, the controls are intuitive and quickly learned. There are five buttons. These are labelled on the inside of the display but the tiny silver writing on a pale background is hard to read except in bright direct light. Memorising the functions is wise. Single button presses cycle between time, altimeter/barometer and electronic compass. A feature I really like is the auto altimeter/barometer one. Set this and the watch switches to altimeter when you're moving and barometer when you're not.

For the GPS a few more presses are required and there are a number of options but the sequences are easy to remember. Go to Navigation and you can get a grid reference or choose a route to follow or a waypoint to go to. Go to Exercise and choose Trekking as your activity

and you can record a track. There's a Track Back option too that you can use to get back to your start point.

The Ambit3 can be linked to a computer and a smartphone so you can synchronise and store data plus change settings and plot routes on a larger screen. The watch has a USB for the computer connection and once I'd downloaded Suunto's Movescount to my Windows 7 PC I found this works well. The Bluetooth connection with my Sony Xperia SP Android smartphone was more problematic, with the phone sometimes failing to connect with the watch and often quickly losing the connection when it did. If the connection works okay you can pair the devices on the hill and use the phone as a second display for the watch and also have calls and messages sent from the phone to the watch. This is very impressive but I think doing

this would detract from just using the watch for quick reference and as a recording device.

The Ambit3 can do far more than the above – the online manual runs to 139 pages – but the fitness and training options are more suited to triathletes and cycle racers than walkers. If

you want to have a fitness record, including how many calories you've used, and even a recovery and sleep plan this watch can provide it. And if you go cycling or swimming you can set the Ambit 3 up for those activities too.

Whilst the Ambit3 Peak is a fairly chunky watch I don't find it uncomfortable to wear. It's waterproof and shockproof and the face is tough and scratch-resistant – that's the meaning of Sapphire in the name. There are less tough (and less expensive) versions.

Battery life varies depending on how often the GPS checks the signal. If you don't use the GPS at all or only for short periods to get a grid reference the battery doesn't need recharging for many weeks. Recharging is via USB so a portable battery pack can be used. The connection to the watch is proprietary though so you can't use the same cable as for your phone. The cable weighs 41g.

The Ambit 3 is expensive but it is a powerful computer. If you like to have navigation information on your wrist it's a good choice. Too late for this review Suunto has just launched a new GPS watch, the Traverse, that sounds like it provides all the outdoor functions of the Ambit 3 at the lower price of £285.

Chris Townsend 

Whilst the Ambit3 Peak is a fairly chunky watch I don't find it uncomfortable to wear

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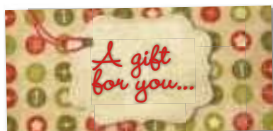
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- 6 **Yorkshire Dales** Malham Moor
- 7 **South Pennines** Shackleton Moor
- 8 **Snowdonia** Bera Mawr & Foel-fras
- 9 **Forest of Dean** Wye Valley
- 10 **East Sussex** Lewes



### CONTRIBUTORS



Alan Rowan



David Lintern



Ronald Turnbull



Joly Braime



Paul Richardson



Roger Butler



John Gillham



Martin Sweeney



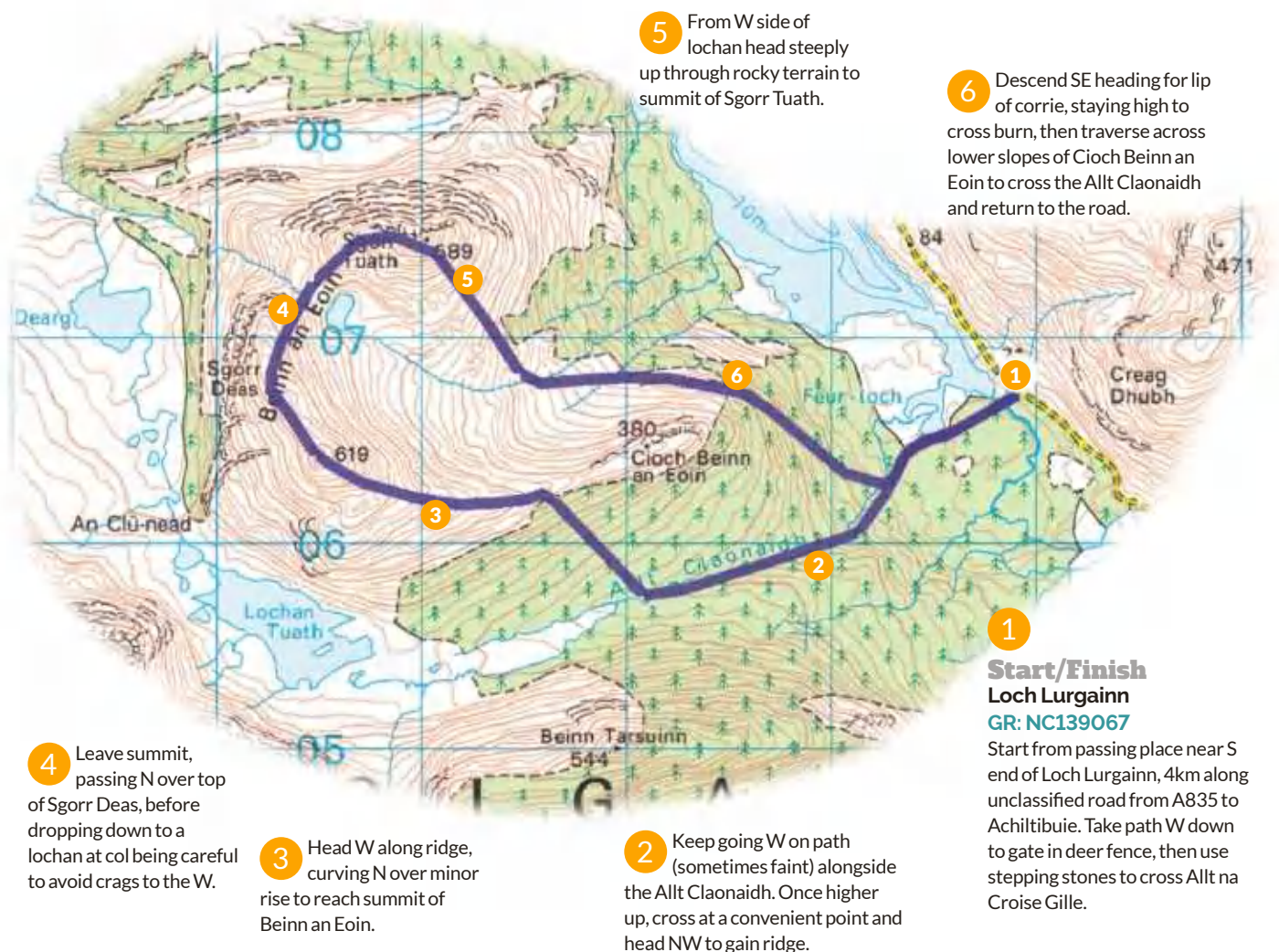
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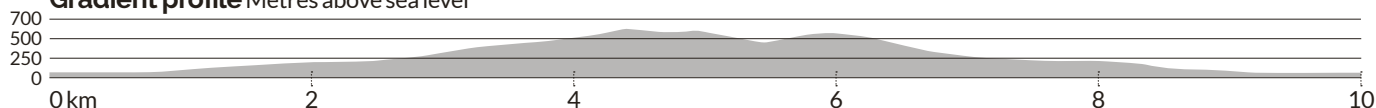
**1** 10km/6 miles/4 hours  
Ascent 730m/2395ft



## Beinn an Eoin North-west Highlands SCOTLAND



**Gradient profile** Metres above sea level



### Alan Rowan enjoys a horseshoe walk in majestic surroundings

THE MOUNTAINS OF the north-west may be relatively small in height, but they are huge in stature. Suilven, Ben More Coigach, Ben Stack – these hills tower over their surroundings putting some of their bigger relatives further south in the shade. Beinn an Eoin is one of this gang of impressive imposters, thrusting up above the land with its partner in crime

Sgorr Tuath in a tectonic form of threat behaviour.

I had been planning to tackle Ben More Coigach en route to Lochinver, but the spell of fine weather had deserted the north-west and the prospect of the long drive round to Achiltibuie and then five hours plus in low cloud seemed a waste for such fine hills. Beinn an Eoin, however,

was lower and away from the coastal mists, and its horseshoe circuit only takes a few hours.

There was a drizzle blowing through and the leaden skies only added to the mountain's aura of formidability, twin prongs of rock like a pair of horns across a landscape which promised a struggle through bog and dense vegetation.



Cloud-capped Stac Pollaidh and Cul Beag






Rocky Sgorr Tuath and its lochan



Beinn an Eoin summit and Sgorr Deas

### Further information


-  **Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 15 (Loch Assynt)
-  **Transport:** Bus service 811 between Ullapool and Achiltibuie [www.scotbus.co.uk/timetables/52-service-811-achiltibuie.html](http://www.scotbus.co.uk/timetables/52-service-811-achiltibuie.html)
-  **Information:** [northhighlandsscotland.com/the-north-highlands/ullapool/](http://northhighlandsscotland.com/the-north-highlands/ullapool/)

Even lowly Stac Pollaidh was wearing a grey cap. I got tucked in off road beside the start of a path which leads to a gate in a deer fence. This involved a delicate balancing act to avoid an early soaking.

There is a suggested route heading diagonally into the corrie but in damp, heavy weather it is probably one for masochists only. I stuck to a semblance of a path beside the tumbling waters of the Allt Claonaidh even though it appeared to be leading me away from the hill at times. When I reached level ground higher up, I made my crossing and a beeline for the ridge. The deep heather and angle of the slope ensured this was harder than it first looked.

Once on the ridge, however, the gentle rise on to the pancake rocks of the summit

was straightforward. The views down to Lochan Tuath with the prow of Sgurr an Fhìdhleir looming above, accompanied by the bellowing of the stags, made this feel like a lost world. A short walk over to the lower top of Sgorr Deas and then a careful descent took me down to a little lochan nestling in the hollow below the impressive crags of Sgorr Tuath.

A slalom through rock scenery got me to the summit and then it was all downhill, a drop into the corrie, a contour across rock-studded slopes and then the unavoidable game of hopscotch to stay out of the worst of the cloying ground. I fared reasonably well, but still arrived back at the car brown and wet from the knees down. Beinn an Eoin may be small but it doesn't go down without a struggle. 



**2** 8km/5 miles/4 hours  
Ascent 900m, 2952ft.



## Buachaille Etive Beag, Glen Coe SCOTLAND

**1**

### Start/Finish

Car Park at the 'Beehive Cairn' on the A82 GR: NN188563

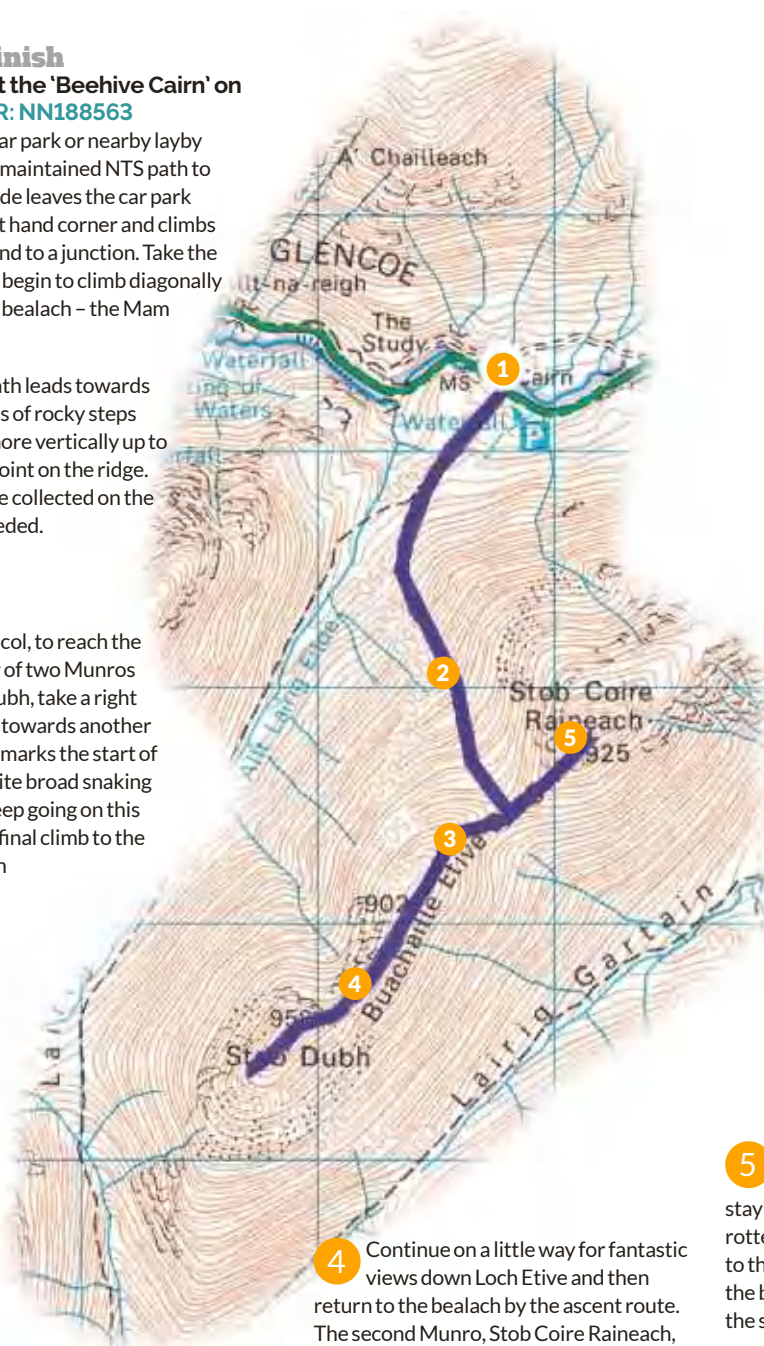
Park in the car park or nearby layby if full. A well maintained NTS path to the Lairig Eilde leaves the car park from its right hand corner and climbs over moorland to a junction. Take the left fork and begin to climb diagonally towards the bealach – the Mam Bhuidhe.

**2**

The path leads towards a series of rocky steps ascending more vertically up to the lowest point on the ridge. Water can be collected on the way up if needed.

**3**

At the col, to reach the higher of two Munros first, Stob Dubh, take a right and head up towards another cairn, which marks the start of a fine but quite broad snaking ridgeline. Keep going on this to make the final climb to the summit cairn



**4**

Continue on a little way for fantastic views down Loch Etive and then return to the bealach by the ascent route. The second Munro, Stob Coire Raineach, is now right in front of you. Ascend over rocky ground, keeping to the right slightly to achieve the second summit. There are multiple paths and lots of erosion but it's relatively short to the top.

### David Lintern witnesses autumn splendour on the 'Little Herdsman'

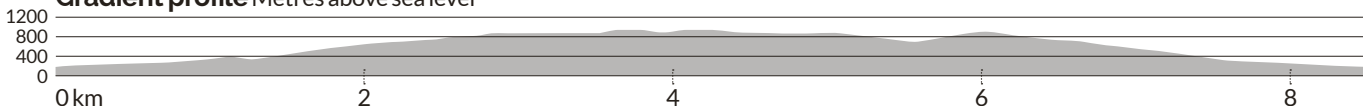
THIS WAS SUPPOSED TO be 'just' a warm up walk for a friend and I before a traverse of the Aonach Eagach the next day, but what a walk it was. We arrived mid afternoon, after a sluggish start putting family chores and work mischief to bed and taking a proper look at Curved Ridge on our way past, still firmly on the 'to do' list. But, starting the walk after 3pm meant walking in as everyone else was walking off, which I often think is the best of all worlds – lots of friendly greetings on the way in, a quiet mountain on the top, and the best light of the day. So it was in this case...

We stretched our legs on those well built steps up towards the mam, with stags clearly audible in the Lairig Eilde below us. As we laboured upwards, the light grew ever more dramatic. At the col, an enormous sunlit wall stretched behind the famous façade of the bigger brother of this little shepherd – the Buachaille Etive Mor. I'd passed by both these hills many times for more burly tops down the glen, but I'd clearly underestimated them both. I had no idea of

**5**

Return by the same route to the bealach, staying left this time to avoid rotten paths and loose scree to the west of the hill. From the bealach descend simply to the start.

### Gradient profile Metres above sea level

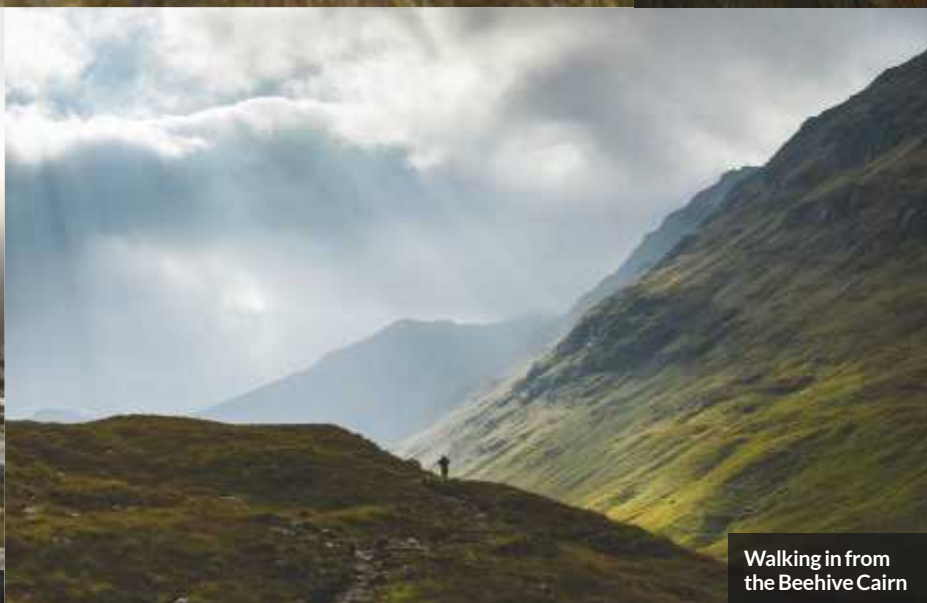




Looking back northeast over the ridge, with Blackwater reservoir in the distance



Taken from the summit of Stob Dubh. It's worth walking a short distance further on, for great views down Glen Etive.



Walking in from the Beehive Cairn

## Further information

**Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer sheet 384 (Glen Coe); Harveys 1:25,000 Superwalker (Glen Coe; Glen Etive & Black Mount)


**Transport:** Citylink buses from Glasgow to Fort William travel along the A82

**Information:** Ballachulish TIC, 01855 811866

the scale of the 'big bookle', or indeed, of this 'little' one. From Glencoe they only present their prow. Behind the scenes, both sport fantastically long and beautiful ridges.

There were now wild, guttural pronouncements issuing from either side of the ridge towards Stob Dubh – the stags were in full voice in the Lairig Gartain too. As the ridge sharpened towards the summit cairn, the complete sense of immersion after such a short walk from the car took me offguard. From the top, there were tiger striped views back along the ridge towards Blackwater reservoir, whilst behind us Loch Etive swirled in and out of

the cloud. We spent a good while soaking up the atmosphere. This was a little hill with a real sense of occasion.

This ridge sports not one, but two Munros. On Stob Coire Raineach all was beautifully still and windless. On our descent a single finger of sunlight cut through the cloud above Bidean, but the colour had now drained from the hills, a reminder of darker, more monochrome months to come. Is there is anything finer than a crisp and windless autumn day in the Highlands? I shall definitely return to visit the 'little shepherd' again in winter, and find out. 



**3** 23.5km/14.5 miles/6.5 hours  
Ascent 500m/1700ft



## Moorfoots, Midlothian / Borders SCOTLAND

### 1 Start/Finish Small pull-off west of Gladhouse Reservoir

GR: NT288535

Head NE along road, then turn R signed 'Gladhouse'. Fork R on path beside reservoir, then rejoin road to cross reservoir dam.

8 At Moorfoot turn L and follow lane to junction. Turn R to car park.

7 As stream hollow opens out, go through gate and bear R to ruins of Hirendeane Castle. Rejoin track to pass Gladhouse Cottage.

2 Before Maudslie, take track ahead SE, R of stream. Through tree belt, cross moor SE to base of hill slope.

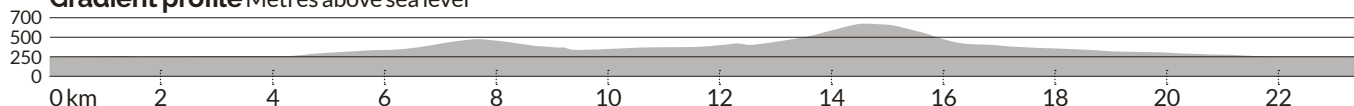
3 Old path follows slope foot, then slants up E to col. Follow fence up L to main (S) top of Torfichen Hill.

4 Track runs down roughly E to meet a larger track just before B7007. Turn back sharp R, past Blackhope farm.

5 After another 2km, just after tin hut, cross stream to head up NE spur of Blackhope Scar. Cross soggy plateau to trig point.

6 Follow fence NW 300m, then bear down L on grassy spur to Long Cleave hollow. Head downstream, soon with track to R of stream.

### Gradient profile Metres above sea level



## Ronald Turnbull makes the most of the Moorfoots

THE SOUTHERN UPLANDS – green swooping hills, stretching right across Scotland, hidden hollows and little craggy bits and miles of grassland where the curlews cry. Every hillwalking lifetime requires 44 days of Southern Uplands. Well, so says my Southern Upland guidebook (which, you've guessed it, has 44 routes in it).

Southern Uplands okay – but maybe not the Moorfoots. Moorfoot sides are spruce trees and knee-high heather. Moorfoot tops are bog. And soggy moss. And bits of old fence wire. And a windfarm. And some more plantations. And another windfarm.

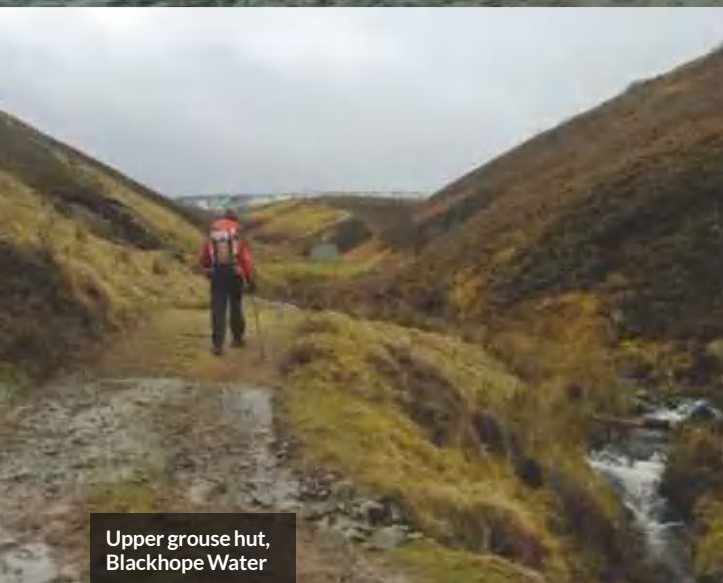
These eastern Southern Uplands are where in Donizetti's opera, Lucia (soprano) di Lammermoor goes rapidly mad while

trembling the turbine blades with her top Cs. Earlier, in Walter Scott's novel, The Bride of Lammermoor ... well I don't know what she did, as Sir Walter's novel is almost as boring as a walk across the Lammermuir plateau.

Faced with the nastiest hill range in Southern Scotland – the challenge is irresistible: find a nice way up it.



Moorfoot edge, seen from Gladhouse Cottage



Upper grouse hut, Blackhope Water



Hirendeane Castle's view to the Pentlands

As a start point, “Gladhouse” sounds slightly less miserable. And indeed it is, as the wide reservoir twinkles under an even wider blue sky. An ancient green path sets off across the moor. Okay, so that bit of ancient path doesn’t actually exist, but I did come across a waymark post. Then the path arises out of the tussocks, and slants up to the view north to the Forth – for this is the Southern Upland edge, and the last high ground before the Highlands. And if these Moorfoots are often overlooked,

once you’re up here what you overlook is the whole of the Lothian lowlands and the Fife Coast.

The top of the hill is, yes, miserable Moorfoots – the answer to that is, just head straight down again. A track not marked on the map leads me into the hidden back glen, where another little green track winds in alongside sparkly waterfalls. Well may we say “*regnava nel silenzio*” (Silence o’er all was reigning) – or sing it rather, as Lucy’s aria in Act One.

On the real hill, just as in the opera, things are about to get nasty. Blackhope Scar is the real thing. Peat and puddles and a whole lot of sphagnum moss, all embellished with some wet snow. As a bit of Moorfoot mockery, all around the edge are the wide blue views, with the sunlit Lothian plains and the twinkling Firth of Forth. Well, it’d be a shame to miss out all of the authentic Moorfoot misery.

Donizetti runs on for just under 3 hours (including sandwich break). But the

soggy bit at the top of this walk is a mere half mile, and a saggy fence line guides me through. Before the mud has properly seeped into my socks I’m at the edge again. And now a nice grassy spur leads down into another of the twisty hill hollows.

At the bottom there’s another stony green track. And more brown peaty waterfalls. High green slopes, and a bit of heather, and no hint of the unappealing peat away at the top of it all. There’s a picturesque tin hut to eat up the leftover sandwiches in. And as the view opens again above the reservoir, here’s a ruined romantic castle, perfectly placed for slowly going mad with full orchestra and an evil bass-baritone in attendance. Or, more prosaically, for sitting to watch the evening fade over the Lothian lowlands.

An altogether nice day out – made even nicer by being sneaked out of the miserable Moorfoots. And not a coloratura soprano anywhere to spoil the silence. 📺

## Further information



**Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 73 (Peebles)



**Transport:** The X63 Edinburgh-Melrose bus would drop you at Waterheads, north of Eddleston on the A703, 6km from the start. This is the nearest bus available.



**Information:** Flotterstone Information Centre on A702 below the Pentlands (0131 445 3383)



**4** 7.6km/4.7 miles/3-4 hours  
Ascent 526m, 1725ft.



## Heron Pike and Sheffield Pike Lake District **ENGLAND**

**6** Descend W on a vague path to join the clear tracks at Nick's Head. Follow this to the mine spill and descend to the YHA and Bunkhouses via the old mine track.

**5** Pass by 3 tiny tarns, and head across rolling moorland for the jumble of cairns at Sheffield Pike.

**4** Once at the walled col there is a choice of paths to take, but keep south of the wall and head WNW ascending over easy, but interesting rocky ground on a very broad ridge to Heron Pike. Occasional handholds useful, but no exposure.

**3** Continue up the hill through ferns and on rough ground, following the stream and then angling W to the flatter ground above Blaes Crag. Here you join a much clearer path contouring easily to The Rake.

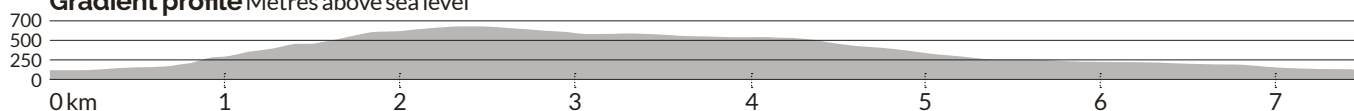
**2** Look to the R to see a small stream above you on the fellside. Handrail alongside this, roughly north over pasture, very quickly reaching a locked gate leading to a brick structure above. The fence is easy to duck through.

**1** **Start/Finish**  
**Tourist Information office and car park, Glenridding**  
**GR: NY386169**  
Exit the car park onto Greenside road and follow it uphill, past the Travellers Rest pub (where dependent on the time of finish, you can refresh yourself). Turn right at the junction, avoiding Gillside Camping and continuing uphill until a long row of cottages is seen on the road ahead.



**7** Follow the road back down the valley to your starting point.

### Gradient profile Metres above sea level



## David Lintern gets up with the larks and herons

A SHORT HOP FROM Glenridding, a tiny winding trail transports us far away from the 3 season crowds, offering superb views over the Eastern fells alongside a good dose of industrial history. For me, this was a walk from the back door of Blae Cottage, right underneath the fell, and I was up with the larks. We'd been visiting family and rented a beautiful little place high above

Glenridding for the week. The house slept on. I crept out of the cottage and stole away onto the fellside for 3 luxurious, solitary hours by 6.30am.

The weather had been mixed but the light good for our entire stay, and that final morning before our return home to the city was no exception. Blocks of cloud moved above me as I climbed, alternating

with bright sunshine that split the fells into receding layers. I clambered through ferns and over rough ground, beginning to wonder if I was going a little astray, but corrected for the flat ground on top of Blae Crag and immediately found the beautiful path contouring around the back of Glenridding Dodd, lined with foxgloves and ferns. The views over to St Sunday



Looking back  
towards Patterdale

Crag, and up the valley towards Raise and Catstycam began to open up. The scene was gold and green – vivid, high contrast saturated colour under stark, black and white clouds.

I passed a tiny stone marked with an H. ‘H is for Heron’, I thought, but I’ve found out since it was a boundary stone marked with an H for Howard, of the Greystoke estate, which bordered here with the Marshall or Patterdale estate. I didn’t detour to Glenridding Dodd at the walled junction, but it would be easy to do should you wish to. Instead, the path was easy to follow up the south eastern ridge towards the first of two Pikes. I picked my way in and out of heather, blaeberry, and juniper bushes nestled in the crags, but there’s no sense of exposure here, just ever improving views on a beautiful, well drained path that feels ancient and modest. The contrast between this delicate trail picking it’s way sensitively up the fell, and the superhighway on top of Raise just a mile or two away couldn’t be more extreme. I had the whole place to myself. A hill before



The rake towards  
Heron Pike

breakfast in these conditions was a real tonic after a week of socialising.

I crested the summit of Heron Pike almost without realising, before sauntering across rolling moorland towards the final cairns of Sheffield Pike. The cloud began to settle in a little, but I didn’t mind at all – I’d had more than I deserved of the magic hour. Breakfast was a curried vegetable pasty from Glenridding Stores, a muesli bar and some water whilst sitting on the cairn, looking over the wonderfully named Seldom Seen down towards Ullswater. Every single time I return to the lakes these days, I find a new gem – it’s nice to be surprised.

It grew chilly so I took the vague ‘trod’ from the summit in the general direction of the old mine tips above Greenside. Between 1825 and 1961 men pulled 159000 tonnes of lead and 45 tonnes of silver out of the hill, and the ruins are still very much

present. The fell above the tips (part of Greenside) is partially collapsed due to the mine works, and the tips themselves are apparently still shifting and causing the local authorities some issues. It’s an uneasy contrast to my previously blissful state and seems to match the change in the weather.

The surprises aren’t over yet. As I descend via the broken, rubble filled mining track, I pass the biggest woodland of Juniper I have ever seen. Not just bushes, but whole trees reaching out across the hillside. Catstycam emerges from the cloud and the scene is bathed in golden light once more. I can’t quite believe what I’m seeing – a rare, priority species in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, positively thriving in an area grazed to the bone and thoroughly plundered for minerals underground. Perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel of industrial exploitation after all. I surely hope so. 📍

## Further information

**Maps:** OS 1:25,000 Explorer OL5 (The English Lakes: North Eastern Area); Harveys 1:25,000 Superwalker (Lake District East)

**Transport:** The Ullswater Steamer travels across the lake between Glenridding and Pooley Bridge, a bus ride from Penrith

**Information:** Glenridding TIC, 01768482414

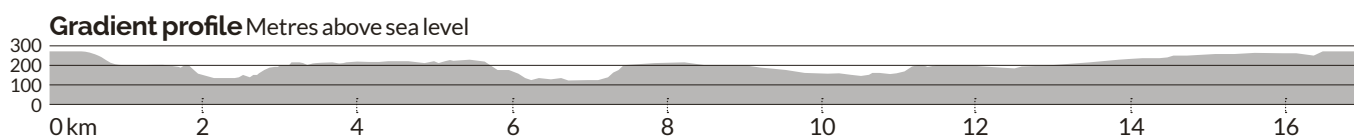
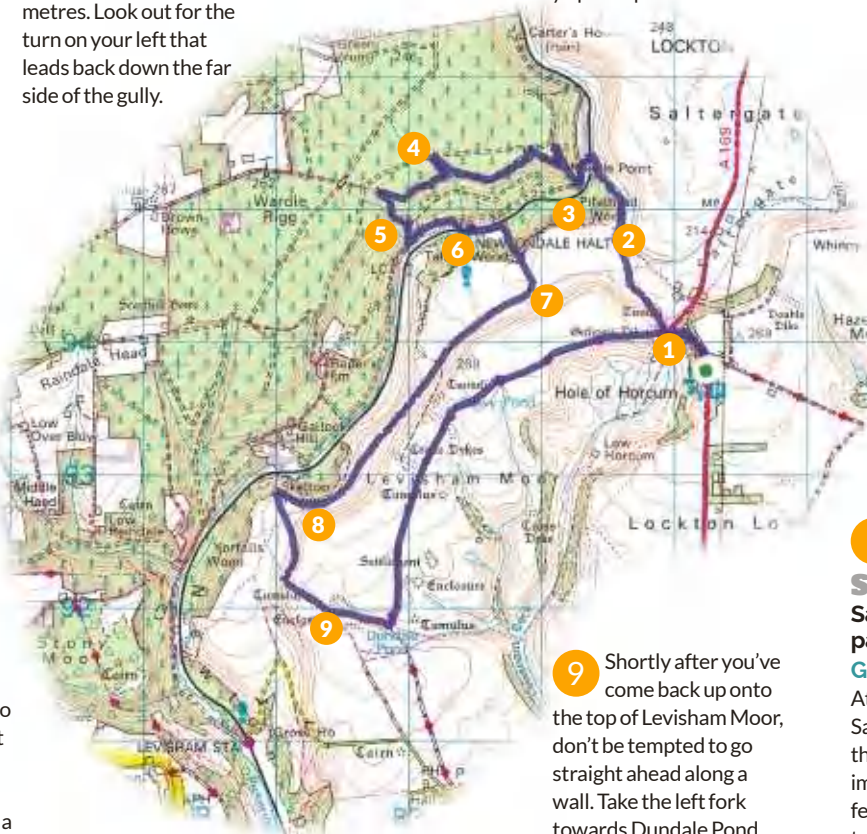


**5** 17km/10.5 miles/5 hours  
Ascent 1105m/3625ft



## Newton Dale, North York Moors **ENGLAND**

- 1** **Start/Finish**  
**Saltergate Bank car park**  
**GR: SE852936**  
At the hairpin bend at Saltergate Bank, go through the gate but turn immediately right along the fence, ignoring the more tempting track ahead.
- 2** There are a lot of paths across this bit of moor, and it's easy to get swept off-course. Aim for the incongruous-looking field at the far side and that should keep you on track. Just before you get there, look for an overgrown path leading off to the right through the heather.
- 3** Down in the valley, the turn up to Needle Eye is easily missed. It's on the first corner after you've crossed the rails and turned left onto the broad forestry track. Look for a steep path leading up to your right, with a green arrow on a post a short way up. The path climbs then doubles back on itself.
- 4** At Yaul Sike Slack, you're only on the forestry track for a few metres. Look out for the turn on your left that leads back down the far side of the gully.
- 5** On the steep descent towards Newtondale Halt, look out for a tall, split tree stump in the centre of the path. If you turn left off the trail here, you should see Beulah House ahead of you in the trees.
- 6** At Newtondale Halt, cross under the railway line, turn left, and follow the path along and across a bridge. You can also begin the walk at Newton Dale Halt if you want to use the train to get in and out.
- 7** After you've climbed back up onto the moor at Hudson's Cross, you need to head cross country for a short way to get to the path. It's not the one you can see along the side of the ridge, but it runs in a broadly similar direction. You can use a compass, follow the stream or just head towards the slope until you find yourself on the right path. It's obvious when you get there.
- 8** As you approach Skelton Tower, look out for a slightly fainter track leading off to the right.
- 9** Shortly after you've come back up onto the top of Levisham Moor, don't be tempted to go straight ahead along a wall. Take the left fork towards Dundale Pond, then a left again once you get to the pond. From there it's plain sailing all the way back to the car park.



### Snakes and abandoned places... explored by *Joly Braime*

**THE HOLE OF HORCUM'S** dramatic punchbowl is one of the flagship sights of the North York Moors. But few venture into the dale behind it – a semi-wild valley where abandoned farmsteads crumble unnoticed among the trees, and walkers are treated to unexpected views across one of the most tranquil parts of the National Park.

From the busy road at 'Devil's Elbow', I headed north west, looking down on the shell of the Saltersgate Inn, once a notorious smugglers' den. It used to be a great hikers' pub, with a legend that if the fire was ever allowed to go out, the ghost of a murdered excise man would rise from his grave beneath it, but it's been a lifeless derelict for years so perhaps he's had his revenge after all.

Descending into the deer-haunted darkness of Pifelhead Wood, I came upon the recognisable remnants of a cluster of buildings that appear on the map simply as a wall. The history of this place and the people who lived here is long lost, but a skeletal plough among the trees speaks of a time before the conifer plantation that's grown up around it.





Highland cattle on  
Levisham Moor



View from Killing  
Nab Scar with bench



Skelton Tower



Beulah House



Hole of Horcum

## Further information

**Maps:** OS 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL27 (North York Moors – eastern area); OS 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 94 (Whitby & Esk Dale)

**Transport:** Yorkshire Coastliner buses stop at the Hole of Horcum and run from Leeds, York, Whitby and Malton, [yorkbus.co.uk](http://yorkbus.co.uk); 01653 692 556. You can also start and finish the walk at Newton Dale Halt, in which case North York Moors Railway runs regular seasonal services from Whitby/Pickering, [nymr.co.uk](http://nymr.co.uk); 01751 472508.

**Information:** North York Moors National Park, 01439 772700; [www.northyorkmoors.org.uk](http://www.northyorkmoors.org.uk)

I crossed the quiet heritage railway line that runs along the valley floor, and climbed steeply up a path known as Needle Eye. The names round here are decidedly Tolkien-esque: Killing Nab Scar; Yaul Sike Slack; Hudson's Cross; Dundale Griff. The view from Needle Point was partially obscured by triffid-like tendrils of bracken, but it didn't matter – the real lookout spot of the day was five minutes further along the cliff, where I gazed down the dale from a bench dedicated to one Frederick Allin Goldsworthy. The memorial plaque read 'Life is not about the number of breaths you take, but by the moments that take your breath away.'

Still absent-mindedly thinking about Goldsworthy's dedication, I nearly trampled a small adder as it lay sunbathing. They're fairly common round here (I once saw a couple of big ones in a single afternoon), and while they're unlikely to do you any harm, it's worth being careful with dogs.

Half way down to the woodland train platform at Newton Dale Halt, I ventured off the path, hunting in the leaf litter for the mossy stone steps up to Beulah House. It's an atmospheric wreck, left to nature in the mid-20th Century, and there's something unsettling about the cast iron range rusting to brown dust among the nettles. It must have been a very remote life.

I climbed back onto the grand expanse of Levisham Moor, returning via the busier paths round the Hole of Horcum, where Highland cattle chewed the cud beatifically as I passed. En route, I stopped by the picturesque husk of Skelton Tower. Built by the Reverend Robert Skelton round 1830, supposedly as a hunting lodge, the local rumour is that he spent most of his time up there dodging his parishioners with a pipe and a glass of the good stuff as he surveyed Newton Dale below.

I can see the appeal.



**6** 15km/9 miles/4-5 hours  
Ascent 270m / 890ft



## Malham Moor, Yorkshire Dales ENGLAND

**5** At road turn R for about 30m, then L on Pennine Way and keep to main track past Comb Hill and along Ing Scar until the top of Malham Cove.

**6** After crossing cove top, turn L downhill and follow Pennine Way back to Malham.

**1**  
**Start/Finish**  
**Malham village**  
**GR: SD901629**  
Take Pennine Way track opposite the Buck Inn then turn L to Janet's Foss.

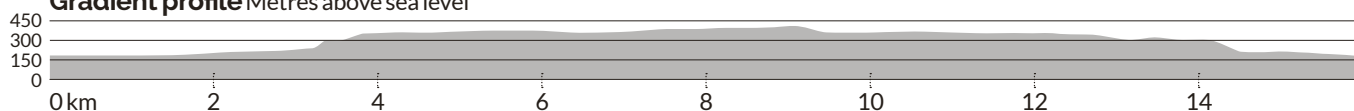
**4** Turn L to skirt the N end of West Great Close then drop down to the shore of Malham Tarn. Turn L and follow Pennine Way past the southern tip of the tarn.

**3** Scramble up the scar and continue sharply uphill until the plateau of Malham Moor. Continue NW, and at the road take the track (through the gate) signed for Arncliffe. Head N, past Great Close Hill on the L, until a junction of tracks just ahead of Middle House Farm.

**2** After waterfall turn R onto the road, then turn L onto Gordale Scar path. Keep on the main track until it leads to the face of Gordale Scar.



**Gradient profile** Metres above sea level



### Paul Richardson joins the throng on a circuit in limestone country

TO ENJOY UNIQUE LANDSCAPES like those above Malham, you may have to share the fells with a few others – but it's well worth it

Malham, with its glut of visitor attractions, is a honeypot for tourists right through the summer months. It's easy to be put off walking around this area because of the sheer number of people you'll be sharing the route with – but that would be

a shame, because the limestone landscape here is pretty much as good as it gets.

We avoided the crowding issue by choosing a particularly fresh winter's day to head out on a route that would take in all the hotspots: Janet's Foss, Malham Tarn, Malham Cove and with a scramble out of Gordale Scar thrown in, we'd have seen it all by the end of the day.

A gentle amble took us to the waterfall at Janet's Foss and gave us the chance to warm up a bit within the comparative shelter of the woods. Leaving the waterfall behind, the approach to Gordale Scar reminded me why I feel drawn to the hills and moors above Malham. The weathering of the limestone here on such a massive scale, has carved out a unique landscape



Waterfall above  
Gordale Scar



Looking towards Malham  
from the top of Malham Cove



Malham Cove from  
the Pennine Way track  
back into Malham



The clamber away  
from Gordale Scar

that needs to be re-visited from time to time to remind myself that it's real.

Nearing Gordale Scar, as the sheer rock faces lining the valley begin to close up, it's hard to imagine a route existing ahead that would allow escape without some serious rock climbing. Luckily though, at the head of the scar is a straightforward and short scramble, leading to the base of a steep track that cuts up the hillside alongside Gordale Beck, giving progressively better views along the gorge.

With some reluctance we dragged

ourselves away from this spectacular cutting to head out over the open fells of Malham Moor. As we approached Great Close Hill we got our first glimpse of Malham Tarn, before skirting West Great Close to bring us onto the shore of the tarn. From here, the remainder of our route would be southwards, following the Pennine Way. Overcrowding certainly wasn't a problem up here – the nithering wind had put off all but the occasional hardy soul, and so it was a very quiet Pennine Way that we followed towards Malham Cove.

The cove lies at the foot of Ing Scar, another superb gorge through countless years of limestone accumulation. As we rounded Comb Hill the spectacular valley below pointed us in the right direction for Malham Cove and yet another geological masterpiece.

The top of Malham Cove is classic limestone pavement, and I suspect this outcrop of rock is the most photographed area in the Yorkshire Dales. Incredibly, as we started our tentative crossing of the

Cove top, the sun came out, so we grabbed our cameras and started adding to the already massive collection of photos. It was the first sunshine we'd seen for quite a while, so we took full advantage, and loitered to bask in the sun and enjoy these amazing surroundings (to the annoyance of one of our small group, who just wanted to get stuck into a cuppa and a chip butty in Malham). Then the sun disappeared as quickly as it had appeared, so we began the descent of the Cove, stopping briefly at its base to appreciate the scale of this limestone face.

If there is a downside to this route, it's that there's a risk of seeing so many incredible geological features in quick succession that you become complacent, and begin to think of this landscape as the norm. This might be one of those occasions when you only appreciate the privilege of simply being in such a special place, once you've left it.

Anyway the call of the chip butty and the warm tea shop had to be answered – another very special place. 📷

## Further information



**Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:50,000 Landranger sheet 98 (Wensleydale & Upper Wharfedale); OS 1:25,000 Explorer OL2 (Yorkshire Dales, Southern & Western areas); Harveys 1:40,000 British Mountain Map (Yorkshire Dales)



**Transport:** Bus service 210 & 211 from Skipton, [www.dalesbus.org](http://www.dalesbus.org)



**Information:** Malham National Park Centre: 01729 833200



**7** 19km/12 miles/6-7 hours  
Ascent 425m / 1400 feet



## Round Hill and Dick Delf Hill, South Pennines **ENGLAND**

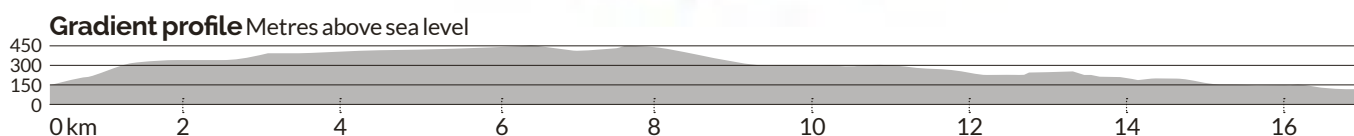
**4** Cross dam and carry on to meet lane and turn L. Fork L at junction, then R on track after 400m and descend to small gate on L.

**3** Join Pennine Way and walk SW for 2km to reservoir. Continue S for 1.5km then turn L on footbridge.

**2** Climb onto moorland and walk N (no paths) for 3.5km to Dick Delf Hill. Veer NNW to Top Withens.

**1**  
**Start/Finish**  
**National Trust car park at New Bridge, GR: SD 989292**  
From car park take path into woods, rising to meet old walled lane. Continue WNW to gate and walk N to Shackleton. Turn R, then L, and go N to next gate onto Open Access land. Continue N for 1.5km to stone stile, then gate.

**5** Go down steps, over footbridge and walk E on good path above river. Join track after cottage and continue through valley. At mill, take riverside path to return to start.



### Roger Butler explores Shackleton and the White Swamp


I GUESS IF YOU'RE going out for a good long walk then somewhere called Shackleton can't be a bad place to start. I had been looking forward to a tramp across the high moors north of Hebden Bridge ever since a farm with the same name as the legendary explorer had leapt from the map above Hardcastle Crags.

I could almost hear the old packhorses

clattering along the narrow paved path which ran through a patchwork of birch, beech, bracken and bilberry. The heavy dew glistened on the grass and a distant mill chimney pierced the sky like a sharpened pencil.

Sunshine flickered in the woods and the twisted oaks and minibus-sized rocks created a secretive atmosphere. Long rolling

spurs pointed deep into Yorkshire and the rocket-like monument on top of Stoodley Pike looked all set for blast off. What a sight that would be as it swept over the surrounding towns and villages!

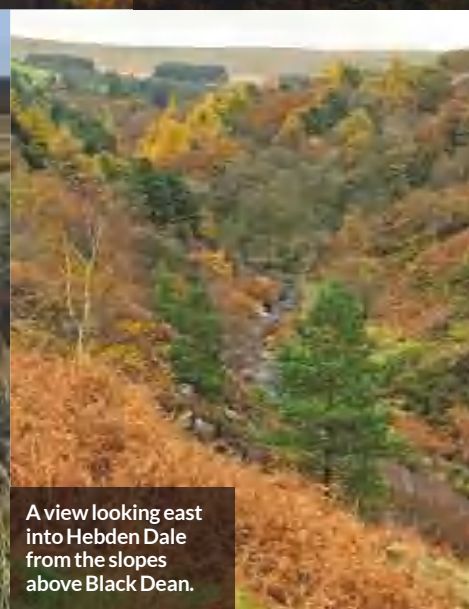
The going got tougher but the gamekeepers were busy up on Round Hill. Their strange caterpillar vehicle sounded as if it was burrowing through the peat, 



View looking E from the edge of Foul Scout Wood near the start of the walk with Wadsworth Moor in the background



The sweeping moorlands below Dick Delf Hill once supported several farmhouses



A view looking east into Hebden Dale from the slopes above Black Dean.

rather than just moving across the bog. A stile dropped me amidst clusters of tall rushes and, as a dozen grouse and a couple of snipe exploded into the air, I looked north to a flat and featureless expanse of rough tussocky moorland.


Who could resist a name like White Swamp? From here, until I reached the

far horizon, every step was a potential ankle twister and in places I found myself wallowing in dark soupy water. I'm no Antarctic explorer but I couldn't help thinking of Shackleton and his brave colleagues and, in my mind, the deep gullies became icy ravines and the peat hags were the tops of tall moraines.


A place of pilgrimage lay on the other side of Dick Delf Hill, but first a series of big grey boulders caught my eye. These tiered down the hillside as if someone had flipped through the pages of a book and, in this case, it would certainly have been Wuthering Heights. The famous ruin of Top Withens has been partly restored and a brand new interpretation panel now tells the story of this isolated farmhouse and its links with the Brontë sisters. Believe it or


not, this is the first time such information has been provided up here and it comes complete with a snappy QR code and even a few words in Japanese.


The Pennine Way led south to the steeply enclosed reservoirs at Walshaw Dean, where sturdy Victorian spillways and weirs were etched into the surrounding landscape. A delightful track followed a gorge with tall angular rocks, gossiping waterfalls and a mature tree which had collapsed, midstream, to form an impressive natural suspension bridge.

Ahead, the wooded valley resembled an artist's palette with leaves of brown, green, yellow and gold all thrown into the mix. My path now undulated above the river to the constant accompaniment of crashing water and gurgling tributaries. 

## Further information

 **Map:** OS 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL21 (South Pennines)

 **Transport:** Nearest station: Hebden Bridge – just 2km from the start of the walk

 **Information:** Hebden Bridge Visitor Centre, 01422 843831



**8** **21km/13 miles/6-7 hours**  
**Ascent** 1100m/3608ft



## Bera Mawr and Foel-fras Snowdonia **WALES**

**1**

### Start/Finish

Car park at entrance to Abergwyngregyn (Aber) village  
**GR SH 655727**

Go west along lane from car park, turn L along passageway then along street through village.

**2**

Take 2nd path on R (GR 6587250, raking WSW up hillslopes.

**3**

Turn L along track to the head of the valley.

**4**

Go over stile by Afon Gam. A sketchy path crosses stream and climbs on spur to the R. Join wider path descending to ford stream. Path rakes L, then R to ford Afon Rhaeadr-bach. Faint path heads NE onto N spur of Bera Mawr.

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**8**

At track intersection turn L beneath pylons. Ignoring minor offshoots, continue to lane end. Follow lane back into Aber.

**7**

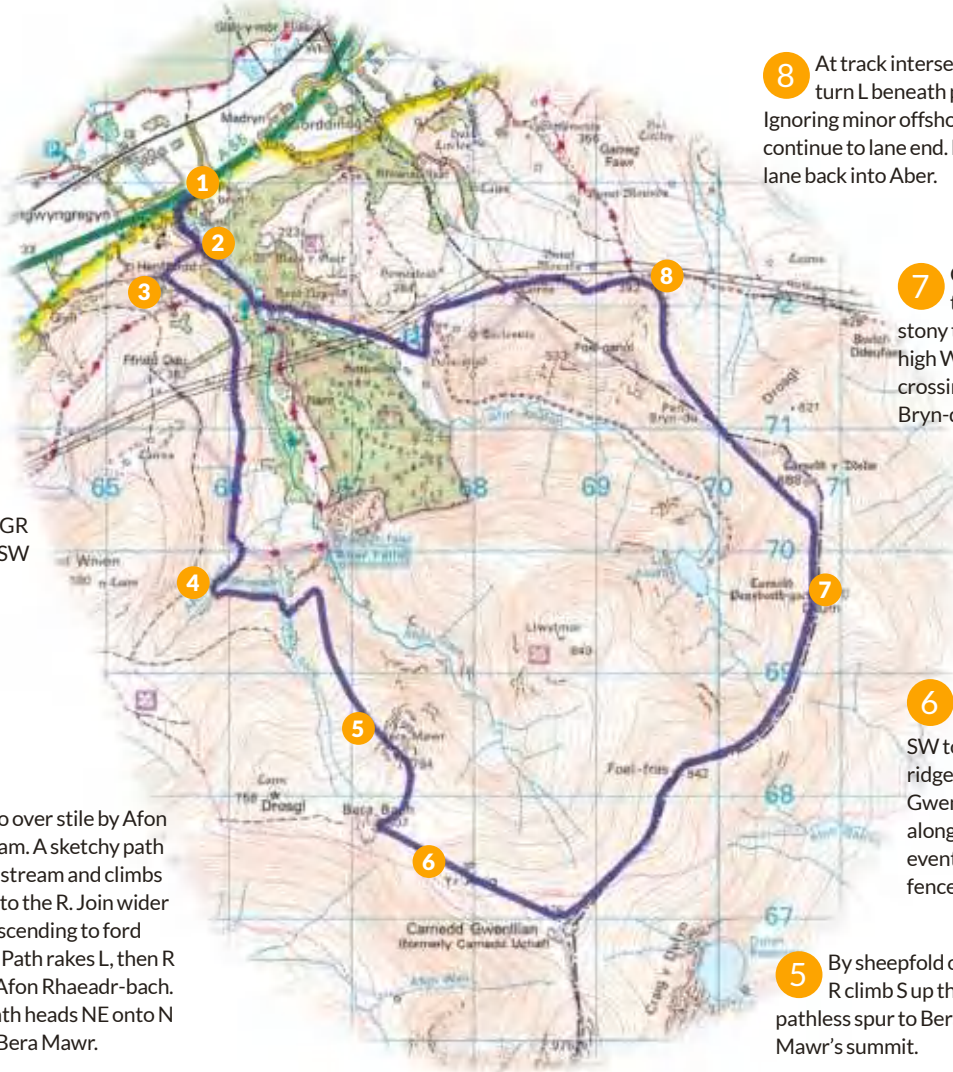
Continue by fence to Drum. Follow stony track across high W slopes of ridge, crossing to E side by Pen Bryn-du.

**6**

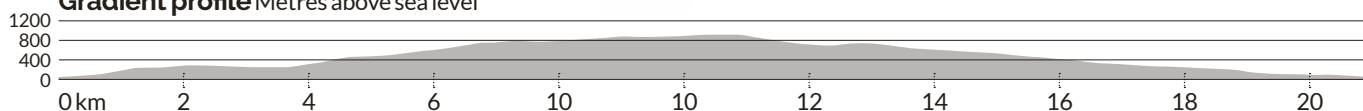
Descend S to marshy col. Climb SW to Bera Bach. Follow ridge ESE to Carnedd Gwernllian. Turn L (NE) along ridge to Foel-fras, eventually following fence/wall to summit.

**5**

By sheepfold on R climb S up the pathless spur to Bera Mawr's summit.



### Gradient profile Metres above sea level



## John Gillham goes walking through the mists of time

ABERGWYNGREGYN, the place at the estuary of white shells, lies on the coast between the vast Lavan Sands and the mountains of the Carneddau. The village, sometimes known simply as Aber, and the mountains behind are brimming with ancient history. Tucked away behind the cottages of the main street, there's a grassy mound, the remains of an 11th-century

motte and bailey castle, which was once home to Llewelyn the Great, Prince of Wales.

As we arrived in the village early morning sea mist had been spreading inland, mingling with the mountainsides. "Give it half an hour and it'll all burn off", Nicola said as she diverted me into the Hen Felin (old Mill) café for a second breakfast

– steaming hot tea and home made cake.

Half an hour later, as we climbed the lovely green track out of the village onto the hillsides, the mist still swirled around the rust-coloured bracken-clad slopes but, now thinning, it left gaps. Through one we could see the distant plume of white that is the Aber Falls, flanked by vast scree slopes and tree-hung black crags. Above them, ➤



Traversing head of Aber valley



Summit of Bera Mawr



Upper crossing of Afon Gam

capping the secret unpopulated world of the northern Carneddau, we recognised the serrated crags of Bera Mawr (the big pyramid).

A high track took us along the west side of the valley before coming to the banks of the Afon Gam stream at the foot of the Carneddau slopes. Over a ladder stile an initially sketchy path took us back across the stream before climbing a grass and bracken spur. A higher path joined us and


took us down to the now craggy ravine of the Gam before fording its shallow waters. A splendid narrow trod weaved around the steep slopes at the head of the valley, giving us glimpses of the impressive crags surrounding the waterfalls of the Afon Rhaeadr-fach Falls (the smaller of two falls). If we let it the path would take us to the Aber Falls proper but we left it for the slog up the grass and bilberry spur of Bera Mawr. The slog was worth it though because soon we are playing at being climbers on the spiky rocks of the summit. The mist had turned to haze and would soon dissipate to form little clouds in an otherwise deep blue sky.

Surprisingly the next summit Bera Bach (the little pyramid) is higher and commands a great view across the deep valley of the Caseg to the pyramidal scree and rock peak of Yr Elen, which is flanked by the colossal and sullen dome of Carnedd Llewelyn.


The next section is continuous high-level on firm stony ground to the 15th three-thousander, Carnedd Gwenllian (formerly Carnedd Uchaf). The gently


domed grassy giant of Foel-fras, the most northerly of the Welsh three thousand foot summits, has sparse crag but fine views of the entire North Wales and Wirral coastlines and the deep valley of the Anafon, where a little reservoir glimmered gold with the late sun.


At Drum we studied the hollowed out Bronze Age cairn. The last of the ancient civilisations, the Ordovices, would have farmed on the upper Carneddau slopes when the Romans came. They were defeated by Julius Agricola somewhere between AD75 and 77 and seemed to disappear from history thereafter.

A stony track took us back towards Aber as the light faded from golden late sunlight to dusky grey. We joined the ancient highway used by Roman troops marching to and from forts at Segontium (Caernarfon) and Canovium (Caerhun) in the Conwy Valley. It led us to a high lane that descended into the semi darkness of the forest, back through the streets of the village. Hen Felin was shut but the promise of a bar meal and a warm fire enticed us through the front entrance of the cosy Aber Falls Hotel. 

## Further information

 **Maps:** OS 1:25,000 Explorer OL17 (Snowdon); Harveys Superwalker: Snowdonia North

 **Transport:** Nearest railway station: Llanfairfechan on Cambrian Coast Railway. Buses: Arriva No 5 between Caernarfon and Llandudno. Express bus stop at nearby Llanfairfechan. [www.conwy.gov.uk](http://www.conwy.gov.uk)

 **Information:** Conwy TIC, 01492 577566; email: [conwytic@conwy.gov.uk](mailto:conwytic@conwy.gov.uk)



**9** 14km / 8.5 miles / 4-5 hours  
Ascent 100m / 330 ft

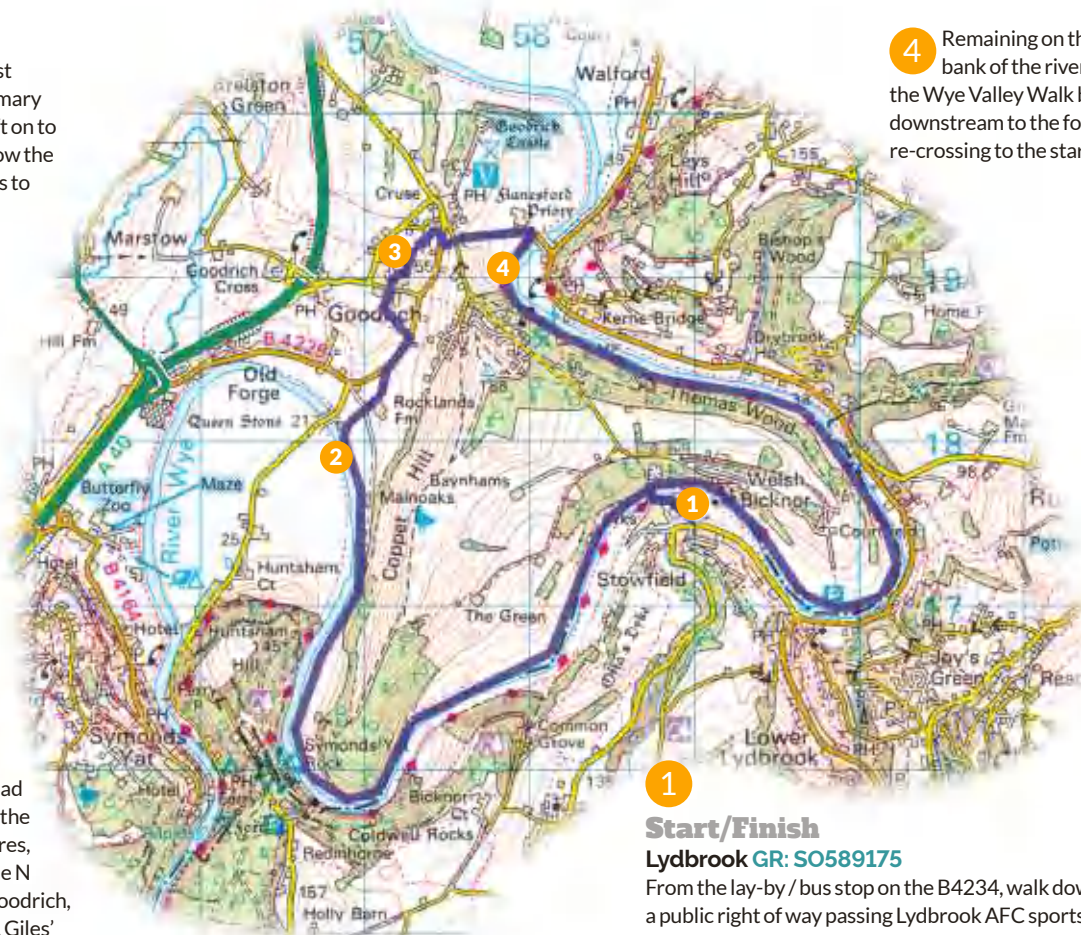


## Wye Valley, Forest of Dean **ENGLAND**

**3** Turn right past Goodrich primary school, and then left on to the main road. Follow the road for 500 metres to Kerne Bridge.

**4** Remaining on the western bank of the river, follow the Wye Valley Walk back downstream to the footbridge, re-crossing to the start point.

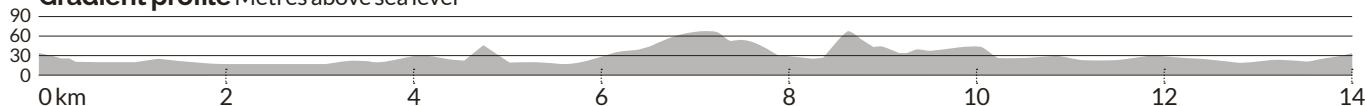
**2** Follow the road N away from the bridge for 200 metres, then continue to the N through fields to Goodrich, passing through St. Giles' churchyard as you enter the village.



**1**  
**Start/Finish**  
**Lydbrook GR: SO589175**

From the lay-by / bus stop on the B4234, walk downhill on a public right of way passing Lydbrook AFC sports ground. Turn left and follow the path along the riverbank, crossing the footbridge. Walk under the bridge on the other side and follow the riverside path to the SW, crossing several stiles before reaching the iron framed Huntsham Bridge.

**Gradient profile** Metres above sea level



### Martin Sweeney takes a walk on the Wye Side

THE RIVER WYE WINDS lazily through the borderlands of Herefordshire and Gloucestershire, close to the Welsh frontier. A meander through this *Wind in the Willows* landscape takes in barely touched riverbanks rubbing shoulders with a slowly receding industrial heritage, nestled in one of England's finest Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Our walk began on the edge of the village of Lydbrook, at the former Edison-

Swan cable works, a sprawling industrial complex that once made telephone cables for use in the First World War trenches. It was bought by a Swedish paper company in the 1960s, but the decaying husk of the factory has stood empty for almost 20 years now. Only a few dozen yards downstream of the factory, a footbridge crosses the river. The Ross and Monmouth Railway that once ran here was lost in the 1960s, but the bridge and a 575m tunnel

through to Goodrich mark the route that once ran here.

We followed the Wye to the west, with only the sounds of honking geese and quarrelsome ducks disturbing the peace. An occasional group of canoeists drifted by on the water below, enjoying the gentle sweep of the river in much the same way as we were.

On the edge of Coldwell Wood, we found a stark reminder that the river is



Nearing Huntsham Bridge



Alpacas at Goodrich



Secluded cottage near Symonds Yat

## Further information

**Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL14 (Wye Valley & Forest of Dean)

**Transport:** Regular buses run between Ross on Wye and Monmouth (service 35), stopping at the start / finish point of the route. Traveline 0870 608 2608.

**Accommodation:** Welsh Bicknor Youth Hostel is located in a former rectory on the edge of the river, also available for camping. Tel 01594 860300. The Hostelrie at Goodrich has rooms available. Tel 01600 890241


**Information:** Ross on Wye information centre, 01432 260675

not always as benign as it initially seems. A memorial stone here commemorates the teenaged John Warre, drowned nearby in 1804. It seems he was tempted, like countless others down the years, by the deceptively inviting waters of the Wye.

As the river bent sharply to the north, we passed Symonds Yat Rock, a great limestone cliff climbing sharply from the riverside to a 120m-high promontory with wide-ranging views across the borderlands. Peregrine falcons can often be seen hunting in the area, before returning to their nests on the steep cliff side.

At Huntsham Bridge we joined the road for a short distance before climbing uphill towards Goodrich. As we neared the

village, we were greeted by the incongruous sight of a handful of alpacas, grazing in the fields. The woolly camelids seemed just as curious about our presence as we were of theirs, and posed happily for photographs before we continued into the village.

A second stretch of road took us to Kerne Bridge, where we re-joined the river. From here we wandered south, passing the well-located Welsh Bicknor youth hostel before returning across the footbridge to our starting point. Accompanied by a glittering river for most of the journey, we experienced dramatic scenery, centuries of heritage and the occasional alpaca during a walk that gave far more than it asked of us. 



**10** 18km/11 miles/5 hours  
Ascent 591m/1938ft



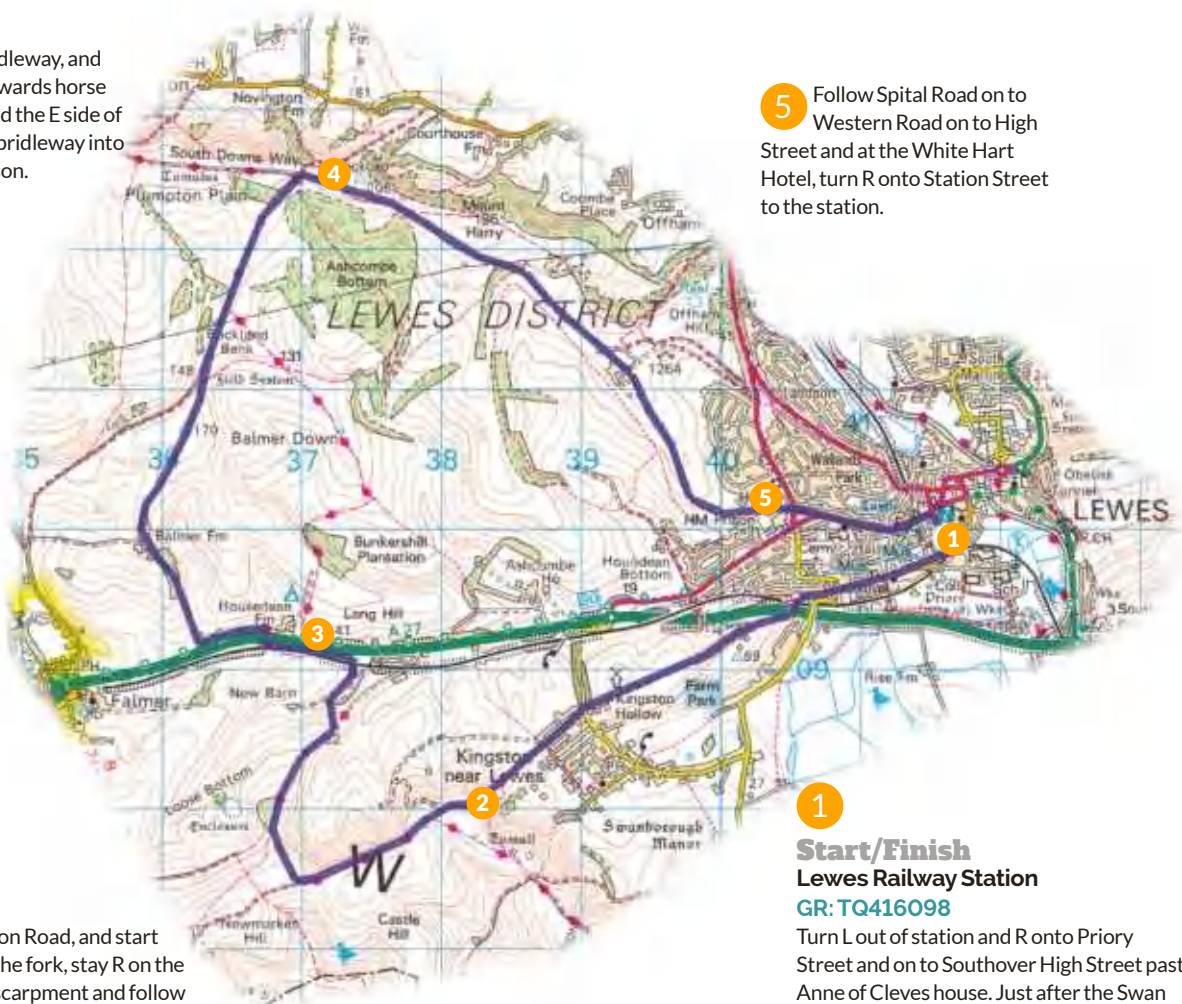
## Lewes, East Sussex **ENGLAND**

**4** Turn R on bridleway, and keep right towards horse stables. Pass around the E side of stables and follow bridleway into Lewes past the prison.

**3** Go under the railway, follow it on SDW and over A27. Turn L at Housedean Farm and then R towards Balmer Farm. Follow bridleway N to Blackcap and the top of the escarpment.

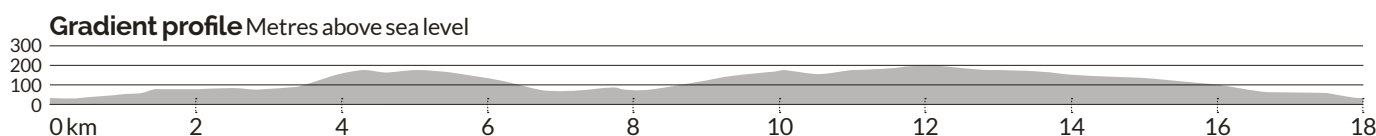
**2** Cross Kingston Road, and start climbing. At the fork, stay R on the N side above the escarpment and follow it around on the South Downs Way (SDW), SW, NW and NNE back down to the train track.

**5** Follow Spital Road on to Western Road on to High Street and at the White Hart Hotel, turn R onto Station Street to the station.



**1**  
**Start/Finish**  
**Lewes Railway Station**  
**GR: TQ416098**

Turn L out of station and R onto Priory Street and on to Southover High Street past Anne of Cleves house. Just after the Swan Inn turn R Juggs Road and follow until it turns into a footpath, past the windmill until you hit Kingston Road.



### *Daniel Neilson* goes meandering on the Downs above a revolutionary town

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE walking through the High Street, a palimpsest of Georgian, Medieval and Tudor buildings, but Lewes has always been one of the most revolutionary places in Britain. It was in the upstairs room of the White Hart Hotel at the Headstrong Club where Thomas Paine cemented his ideas for the American Revolution. But it's at the Lewes bonfire

celebration on November 5 that the town comes alive, and in shocking fashion. It commemorates 17 protestant martyrs who were burnt at the stake. It's a riotous affair, with parades of Bonfire Societies, each member in carnival dress and holding aloft a burning lantern. Effigies of current public enemies are burnt, but it's the traditional burning of the Pope that perhaps is most

controversial. When it's not being set alight in drunken revellery, Lewes is a quiet and beautifully preserved town – perhaps the most lovely in Sussex.

I left the town of Lewes (handy for trains, being only an hour from London) three weeks before November 5th on a cold, breezy but cloudless day. I adore days like this. Out of the station, I



Looking south from Loose Bottom



Finger post on the South Downs Way near Blackcap



North climbing towards the ridge of the South Downs

walked west out of the town, past the 15th Century house built for Anne of Cleves. She was clearly not chuffed with being seconded by Henry VIII to a rebellious Sussex town and she never visited. At the Swan Inn I turned onto Juggs Lane to Kingston, so named, after the baskets that Brighton fishwives used to carry along this lane to sell in Lewes. As I climbed

onto the highpoint, marked by a replica of Ashcombe Mill, the views opened up. The South Downs are dominated by a 70-mile (112km) chalk escarpment that drifts from near Winchester to its dramatic ending at Beachy Head near Eastbourne. I was standing just above an expansive break in the ridgeline formed by the River Ouse. I drive through this area a couple of times a week, but I'm still blown away by the huge views on this particularly clear day.

I jumped briefly onto the South Downs Way, and north under the railway line and over the A27. From here, it was a long slow trudge up the back of the wave-like downs to the crashing escarpment. Along the ridge I saw day walkers, two mountain bikers and then a thundering white horse – I felt I was in an advert for the South Downs National Park. I had my

sandwich at Blackcap, a National Trust area formed to protect the nine species of orchid, Chalkhill Blue butterflies and 50 species of birds. I marvelled at this island of biodiversity a while and started the slow descent back into Lewes. Farming relics lie by the bridleway, a reminder that this is a land that has been farmed for millennia, while the map marks dozens of Tumuli, ancient burial mounds – there were a dozen or so in the four-kilometre walk back to the town.

Along the High Street, only hints give away the rebellious spirit of Lewes. "Lewes Pound accepted here", "Thomas Paine, writer and revolutionary lived here". I'll be back on the fifth, I rarely miss it. Life is turned upside down for a day – and everyone needs that to happen occasionally. 📍

## Further information



**Maps:** Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 Explorer sheet OL11 (Brighton & Hove)



**Transport:** Trains to Lewes from London and connecting stations, as well as Brighton and Eastbourne



**Information:** Lewes TIC, 187 High Street, 01273 483448



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# READERS' PHOTOS

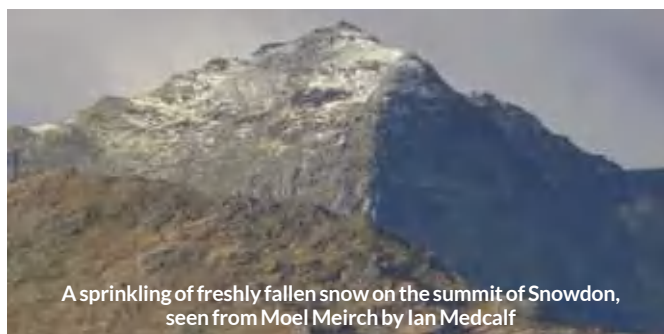
## *'First snow'*



Last year's first snow on Shutlingsloe in the Peak District, by Rod Dunn



Chris Dale snapped this idyllic scene



A sprinkling of freshly fallen snow on the summit of Snowdon, seen from Moel Meirch by Ian Medcalf



The first snow seen on Hamel Down, Dartmoor, in 2010 by Anne Satow

In our readers' photography series, we ask you to send in your best pictures on a specific theme. Next is 'Winter wildlife' by 24 November then 'Bothy' by 16 December.

Next month: *'Winter wildlife'*

Send your pics to [editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk](mailto:editorial@tgomagazine.co.uk) or The Editor, The Great Outdoors, Kelsey Publishing, Cudham Tithe Barn, Berry's Hill, Cudham, Kent, TN16 3AG



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